Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Published: April 17, 2008
Last Updated: December 16, 2010
Program Results Report
Grant ID: 53792

Healthy Steps[SM] Program Gets Young Children Started on the Right Foot—But Fails to Find a Permanent Home

Activities to promote the broader dissemination of Healthy Steps: A developmental health approach for children ages zero to three

SUMMARY

Developed in 1994, Healthy Steps for Young Children (Healthy Steps[SM]) is a program in pediatric and family practices that focuses on the first three years of life. A child development specialist provides parents with information and services that are not typically available to them. During this project, Healthy StepsSM staff established the program at new sites and continued to support existing sites while working to institutionalize the program.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported earlier stages of Healthy Steps. See Program Results Report.

Key Results

- Program staff and consultants from Boston University provided training and technical assistance to 20 new Healthy Steps practices, seven of which also incorporated the program into residency training programs.
- Program staff strengthened the partnership between Healthy Steps and the American Academy of Pediatrics as part of an effort to find a permanent home for Healthy Steps.
- Program staff explored other options and funding sources for a permanent home for Healthy Steps.

Funding

RWJF supported this unsolicited project with two grants totaling $399,879 from 2003 to 2006.

THE PROBLEM

In the early 1990s, people and organizations concerned about child growth and development recognized that parents talk to their pediatricians about these issues, and that most pediatricians have limited time to respond. In addition, studies of early brain development supported the contention that a family's care for its young child lays the foundation for the child's growing up to become a healthy, responsible and productive adult.

About Healthy Steps for Young Children

Developed by the Commonwealth Fund in 1994, Healthy Steps for Young Children is a national initiative that emphasizes a close relationship between health care professionals and parents in addressing the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children from birth to age three.

The program is offered in pediatric and family practices, and features a Healthy Steps specialist who enhances the regular services offered to parents. The specialist—a new team member or a nurse, child development specialist or social worker already on staff—is trained to address behavioral and developmental issues.

Participating families receive standard pediatric care along with some or all of seven other services:

- Enhanced well-child care.
- Up to six home visits in the first three years.
- A telephone line for non-emergency developmental concerns.
- Developmental assessments.
- Written materials.
- Parent groups.
- Links to community resources.

Results of Healthy Steps

Healthy Steps originally started with 25 sites but added more over time. Several evaluations demonstrated the effectiveness of the program, including a three-year controlled study of 15 original sites that was conducted by a team from Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health.

Referred to as the national evaluation, the study showed that Healthy Steps could enhance the quality of care for families of young children and improve parenting practices

(Minkovitz CS, Hughard N, Strobino D, Scharfstein D, et al. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 2003). For example, children in Healthy Steps practices received more timely well-child visits and vaccinations than other children.

A follow-up of national evaluation families conducted when the children were age 5.5 years found that key results persisted well beyond the period of participation in Healthy Steps services. These included:

- Greater satisfaction among parents with their child's health care.
- Greater odds that parent's will report a child's serious behavioral issue to the pediatrician.
- Greater likelihood that the child will receive anticipatory guidance.
- Greater odds of children reading books.
- Parents were less likely to use severe discipline such as spanking with an object or slapping in the face.
- Parents were more likely to keep their children at the same pediatric practice.

See C. Minkovitz, et al, "Healthy Steps for Young Children: Sustained Results at 5.5 Years," *Pediatrics*, 120(3): e658–e668, September 2007.

Healthy Steps℠ Management

Michael C. Barth, Ph.D., of ICF International, a consulting firm in Fairfax, Va., has been the project director since the inception of Healthy Steps. Margaret Mahoney, the former president of the Commonwealth Fund, has served as senior advisor since 1995, when, upon her retirement, she formed MEM Associates, in New York City to work on Healthy Steps and other projects.

Faculty members from Boston University School of Medicine have provided training and technical assistance for Healthy Steps since the program's inception.

RWJF Support for Healthy Steps

RWJF provided past support to Healthy Steps with these grants:

- ID# 030601 to the Independent Production Fund in 1997 for work on a Healthy Steps multimedia training package. (See Program Results Report.)
- ID# 031255 to ICF Incorporated in 1997 to support two new Healthy Steps sites and to fund an evaluation by the Johns Hopkins team of six sites that were not included in the national evaluation for lack of matched control groups. ID# 040304 to ICF in 2001 to expand and sustain the program at new and existing sites. This was part of a

larger project to sustain Healthy Steps with primary funding from the Commonwealth Fund ($13.7 million). (See Program Results Report.)

THE PROJECT

By 2003, Healthy Steps was established in 38 pediatric and family practices and interest in the program was growing. That same year, the Commonwealth Fund ended its support for Healthy Steps. Program staff wanted to continue Healthy Steps, institutionalize its training and technical assistance and find a permanent home for it. RWJF became the lead funder for the program.

Healthy Steps[SM] program staff used these two grants, which ran from 2003 through 2006, to focus on:

- Establishing new Healthy Steps sites.
- Solidifying partnerships with key groups in the health care field.
- Developing strategic communications and marketing.
- Providing training and technical assistance to new and existing sites.
- Institutionalizing Healthy Steps.
- Planning for a permanent home for the program.
- Accelerating its implementation in pediatric residency training.
- Including Healthy Steps in pediatric nurse practitioner training programs.

For information about communication activities, see Results and the Bibliography.

Other Funding

Healthy Steps raised $586,000 between 2003 and 2006 from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation ($248,000), Carnegie Corporation ($143,000), Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation ($123,000), W.K. Kellogg Foundation ($100,000), Kansas Health Foundation ($48,000) and the Golden Family Foundation ($24,000).

RESULTS

Program staff reported the following results in reports to RWJF:

- **Some 20 new sites established Healthy Steps.** Seven of the sites were hospitals or medical centers that also incorporated the program into their residency training programs. (See Appendix 1 for a list of the new sites.) Some of these institutional sites started multiple practices. For example, program staff and faculty from the

Boston University School of Medicine were supporting 48 Healthy Steps practices by the end of the second grant.

- **About one-third of all Healthy Steps practices were using their own funds to pay for the Healthy Steps specialist,** according to Program Director Michael C. Barth, Ph.D., at ICF. "Physicians, particularly in pediatrics, are not making a lot of money and have high costs. For them to hire a Healthy Steps specialist and pay for her out of their own pockets is a significant endorsement of the program," said Barth. "Despite the fact that nobody has any money and it's very difficult to do these types of things, sites keep starting Healthy Steps."
- **Program staff strengthened the partnership between Healthy Steps and the American Academy of Pediatrics,** providing materials and advice for the academy's revision of its Bright Futures initiative for primary care for children and adolescents.
- **Staff worked to find a permanent home for the program.** Efforts included discussions with American Academy of Pediatrics officials, staff and members about integrating Healthy Steps into Bright Futures. Program staff also considered several universities, a teaching hospital and a health care network as well as corporate partners.
- **Healthy Steps staff worked with leaders from the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners and the Association of Faculties of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners** to include Healthy Steps in student training at 20 pediatric nurse practitioner programs in the United States. It is unclear how many programs took up the Healthy Steps approach.
- **A total of 18 sites included Healthy Steps in their pediatric residency training programs by the end of the project.** Staff used personal meetings, direct mail, e-mail and telephone calls to develop relationships with leaders from the:
  - Pediatric Education Steering Committee
  - American Board of Pediatrics
  - Association of Pediatric Program Directors
  - Ambulatory Pediatric Association
  - Academic Pediatrics Association, Association of Division Directors of General Pediatrics.
- **Two practices in Kansas City, Mo., formed partnerships that showed how Healthy Steps' reach could be extended:**
  - Swope Health Services joined with Head Start to provide a medical home to some 90 children. Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by providing educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to children and

families. This collaboration could serve as a model for other communities, according to Barth.

  - University of Kansas Medical Center, Department of Pediatrics, in Kansas City Kan., partnered with Parents as Teachers, an education and support program serving families from pregnancy through kindergarten entry. Specialists work with families to enhance the child's language development, intellectual growth, social development and motor skills. Parents as Teachers supported three Healthy Steps specialists in Kansas City to serve families enrolled in the program.

- **Program staff conducted a variety of communications and marketing activities to raise awareness of Healthy Steps.** This included:

  - Developing an interactive multimedia training and resource kit (available for purchase on the Healthy Steps website).
  - Revising the *Healthy Steps in Residency Training* briefing. Available on the website.
  - Publishing evaluation findings in journals, including *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, and *Pediatrics*.

  For more information about communication activities, see Appendix 2 and the Bibliography.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Publish in top peer-reviewed journals to foster changes in health care practices and procedures.** Publishing in journals such as the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *Pediatrics* enabled project staff to disseminate information about Healthy Steps efficiently, providing a strong evidence base for the program and building respect for it. "You need your bona fides if you're trying to sell something new. Publication in prestigious journals provides that." (Project Director/ Barth)

2. **Be persistent but patient when trying to change health care practices and procedures.** Although staff used various types of communication to inform people about Healthy Steps and provided any assistance needed, they found people needed time to think about the program. (Project Director/ Barth)

3. **Pay constant attention and devote sufficient resources to communication with program participants and interested parties.** "If you don't communicate, people don't know you exist. We helped sites by letting them know what was going on and the [products] we had," said Barth. "Good communications helped maintain knowledge of the program." (Project Director/ Barth)

4. **Highlight favorable outcomes to raise funds to sustain program sites.** The favorable evaluation of Healthy Steps and its track record in communities enabled

Healthy Steps practices to raise funds from local philanthropies in their areas to sustain the program. (Project Director/Barth)

5. **Try to raise long-term funds to foster long-term planning. Healthy Steps operated from grant to grant.** Staff members were unable to do long-term planning, which hampered efforts to find an institutional home. (Project Director/Barth)

AFTERWARD

Project staff was unable to find an institutional home for Healthy Steps or to raise sufficient funds to support a permanent home for it. Barth closed the Healthy Steps office in spring 2008. The Training and Technical Assistance operation at Boston University School of Medicine remained in operation to assist existing and potential new sites. The Healthy Steps website remained in operation.

Kate Kraft, the former RWJF program officer for several of the grants to fund Healthy Steps^{SM}, noted that it is very difficult to find funding for this type of program. "Part of the issue for Healthy Steps is that it is a universal program available to all kids between 0 and 3. Many funders want to focus on vulnerable populations," said Kraft.

Kraft also noted that program staff was unable to get wide-scale support from health insurers because they do not fund prevention services such as Healthy Steps. "There is a market demand but the market just can't pay the full cost of implementing the project without some mechanism of reimbursement for the practice," said Kraft.

Bright Futures Uses Information from Healthy Steps^{SM}

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics chose not to integrate Healthy StepsSM into Bright Futures, it did use program concepts and materials in its revisions to Bright Futures, according to Barth and Anita Berry, M.S.N., C.N.P./A.P.N.

Berry directs the Healthy Steps^{SM} program at Advocate Health Care in Oak Brook, Ill., a site funded under one of RWJF's early grants. She also served on several important advisory committees for the Bright Futures Education Center, which revised the Bright Futures program and materials in September 2007. *Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents—Third Edition* (available for purchase) describes the revised program.

"There's a lot about Healthy Steps that they [the American Academy of Pediatrics] were very receptive about," said Berry. "They weren't receptive about adding another person [the Healthy Steps specialist], but they were receptive about using the materials."

According to Berry, the revised Bright Futures incorporates Healthy Steps content in areas such as universal screening, anticipatory guidance (parent education through age-appropriate counseling), promoting child development and community relationships and

resources. Bright Futures is using many Healthy Steps parent handouts on a variety of medical, developmental and practical topics. The revised patient encounter forms also include information from Healthy Steps.

Spreading the Steps

In December 2010, the Commonwealth Fund published a report of a study of the status of operating Healthy Steps sites. *Healthy Steps at 15: The Past and Future of an Innovative Preventive Care Model for Children*. The report indicates that 50 sites are still operating Healthy Steps.

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APPENDIX 1

New Healthy Steps[SM] Sites

New Sites with Residency Training

Arizona
- Phoenix Children's Hospital (Phoenix)

California
- University of California, San Francisco, Fresno Pediatric Residency Training Program, University Medical Center (Fresno)

Colorado
- Children's Hospital (Denver)

Kansas
- University of Kansas Medical Center, Department of Pediatrics Residency Training Program (Kansas City)
- University of Kansas Medical Center, Wesley Pediatric Clinic (Wichita, Kan.)

New York
- Montefiore Hospital (Bronx)

North Carolina
- Carolinas Medical Center (Charlotte)

Other New Sites

Arizona
- Banner Desert Medical Center (Mesa)
- Mayo Clinic Family Medicine - Thunderbird (Scottsdale)

California
- John F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation (Palm Desert)

Florida
- Miami Beach Community Health Center (Miami Beach)

Georgia
- Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (Atlanta)

Illinois
- PCC Community Wellness Center (Oak Park)

Massachusetts
- The Teen and Tot Center, Boston Medical Center (Boston)

Michigan
- Children's Hospital of Michigan, Pediatric Mobile Team, Detroit Medical Center, Wayne State University (Detroit)

Mississippi
- Children's Clinic of Oxford (Oxford)
- Sunshine Medical Clinic (Canton)

Missouri
- Cabot Clinic (Kansas City)

Oklahoma
- Payne County Health Department (Stillwater)

Pennsylvania
- University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, St. Margaret New Kensington Family Health Center (New Kensington)

APPENDIX 2

Additional Communication Activities

- Subcontracted with Widmeyer Communications (Washington and New York) to develop Healthy Steps messages and with ICF Consulting (part of ICF International) to prepare a draft communications plan and materials (e.g., a new brochure).
- Publishing nine issues of an electronic newsletter, *Healthy Step E-Update*, and other publications on the American Academy of Pediatrics' *www.dbpeds.org* (developmental behavioral pediatrics online).
- Developing Reimbursement for Healthy Steps, a primer on reimbursement.

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