



Alberta Home Visitation
Network Association

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Message from the Provincial Director

Connecting Through AHVNA

By Lavonne Roloff

At the Annual General Meeting in June, The Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AHVNA) elected the board members for 2017-18. In September, at the first board meeting, the following board positions were elected: Marianne Dickson as the chairperson, Marianne Symons as the vice chairperson, Dianne Petersen as secretary and Sharon Schultz as treasurer. Joelle Berard, Devon Eisentrager-Read, Jayne Forster, and Julia Schmidtke are all members-at-large. As part of the Board, each individual comes to the table to discuss business related to home visitation and early childhood in Alberta and how to further the work of the network.

By being a part of the network, members connect with and learn from other professionals in the field. Indeed the role of the network is to make connections for mutual support, learning, creativity and innovation. AHVNA connects the members through the website, Facebook, publications and network meetings. Members participate in working groups, giving each individual the opportunity to focus on areas of interest and connect with others with similar interests. When we connect with one another, we strengthen our practice as well as that of home visitation.

The board meets regularly, mainly by teleconference. The working groups meet as often as there is business to discuss and mainly

by teleconference. Two of the network meetings are held in person in Red Deer and one by teleconference. The Annual General Meeting is held in conjunction with the professional development day. Agencies are encouraged to bring their team to the professional development day so that their staff can network and connect with others from across the province. AHVNA training is another opportunity to connect with others in home visitation programs as well as others in the human services field.

Connecting with others in the field provides opportunities to learn and grow, benefitting those we serve. Come and connect with us at an AHVNA event. ■

Lavonne Roloff is the provincial director of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AHVNA).

In the picture from left to right:

Julia Schmidtke (member-at-large), Marianne Symons (vice chairperson), Marianne Dickson (chairperson), Lavonne Roloff (provincial director).

Parent Coaching for Home Visitation

By Lori Roggman

Parent coaching is a developmental parenting approach for supporting parenting challenges. What parent coaching is not is “therapy” or “just talking.” And it *is not* parenting education, because the coach is not “telling parents what to do.”

Variations of the coaching cycle have been used in sports, business and education.

Figure 1, from the United States National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning shows a coaching cycle for coaches working with teachers. In early childhood programs, coaching has been used to guide early education teachers and care providers to increase the quality of teaching and care.

Figure 1



Components of coaching models

Components of various coaching models include the following cyclical sequence:

1. establish a positive encouraging relationship
2. observe and identify strengths
3. respond with reflective feedback about strengths
4. identify a proximal goal (a “next step”)
5. plan the goal (and back to 2)
6. observe progress toward their goal

This coaching sequence parallels a developmental parenting approach for home visitors working with parents. Home visiting practices that have the strongest research support include relationship building, responsiveness to family strengths and goals, facilitating parent-child interaction and forming collaborative partnerships. In home visiting, focused observation identifies practices that a parent is already using to support the child’s early development. Reflection and feedback on these processes is a collaborative process to

- identify goals for parenting and child development
- plan practical ways the parent can support the child’s learning and development

A *Child Trends* review of coaching in early care and education programs (County et al., 2011) noted that coaching activities varied widely. But, generally, early childhood coaching activities contain elements similar to coaching in other fields. Supported by research literature for home visitation, parent coaching activities are appropriate for home visitors working with parents. These include the following:

- building relationships
- assessing parenting practices
- setting goals
- solving problems collaboratively
- writing plans
- observing and reflecting
- discussing video recordings of practices

Coaching using technology

Most coaching models allow for adapting the pace and activity to each individual and family as the process evolves. Technology is a key component in several coaching models, especially using video recordings to reflect on practices with children in face-to-face coaching. In online coaching, video recordings can be uploaded for observation and feedback, or observations can be done directly online. Email messages and texting can provide feedback, relevant information and encouragement and to maintain the relationship.

Online parent coaching support

Happy Family Parent Coaching at <http://www.happyfamilyparentcoaching.com/> describes parent coaching as a supportive, helpful and enjoyable way to guide parents through challenges they experience with their children. It is not for parents or children who need therapy, but rather for parents who just need some support in dealing with the typical parenting challenges. The parent coach collaborates with the parent to identify goals and plan strategies to reach these goals. Each parent takes small steps between sessions to improve their situation. There is no one right way to approach any challenge because the right way depends on each family’s situation and strengths.

Career path for parent coaching

Parent coaching is a career path. Currently, there is a rapid expansion of programs for parents of young children in early care and education, early intervention for children with disabilities, health care, mental health care and child welfare. These programs include home visits as well as parent groups that meet together with their infants and/or young children. Some parenting coaches have set up private practice or have been privately certified.

Parent coaching provides home visitation workers with strategies to assist families with their everyday parenting challenges. Whether in person or using technology, home visitors can apply coaching strategies to work collaboratively with families of infants and young children. ■

Isner, T., Tout, K., Zaslow, M., Soli, M., Quinn, K., & Burkhauser, M. (2011). Coaching in Early Care and Education Programs and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS): Identifying Promising Features. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Retrieved May 25, 2011, from <https://childtrends-ciw49tixgw5lbbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2011-47CoachingEarlyCareEducation.pdf>

Lori Roggman, Ph.D., Professor of Human Development at Utah State University, began her career as a Head Start (“Home Start”) home visitor and continued as a trainer and consultant for practitioners in infant-toddler and early childhood programs. Since receiving her PhD in Developmental Psychology at the University of Texas, she has done extensive research on parenting and early intervention in relation to children’s early social, cognitive and language development and has collaborated with multiple early childhood projects that engage parents in supporting their children’s early development. She is a co-researcher and author of Developmental Parenting: A Guide for Early Childhood Practitioners.

The Strength of Connections

By Beth Broad

“Only through our connectedness to others can we really know and improve ourselves.”

- Harriet Lerner



I'd like to start by asking you a question. Have you ever stopped to think about how many professional connections you make every day, every week, every year?

Years ago when families needed 'help' or to be 'fixed,' they were sent to 'experts.' Thank goodness we now have evolved to understand that families are not broken and don't need to be fixed. Kindness is no longer viewed as weakness, and nurturing is a required skill for home visitors. Yes, families have unique needs and sometimes multiple challenges, but they also have strengths and resilience, and they truly are the best advocates for their own children. Most parents simply want the very best life possible for their children. However, there are many different ways to support and encourage families in helping them make connections. Some families truly want to connect to make changes, but are unsure of how to begin or where to start. There are a wide variety of tools available to assist us in identifying needs and implementing strategies that fit families' unique requirements. The one size fits all model is now happily retired. Time and time again working together with families and preferring to use the wisdom that tells us there is no 'expert' in this relationship, has created a bond of trust. The home visitation relationship is a journey taken together, where we often learn from each other. Experience has taught us that families achieve success in their goals when they become confident in their competence to provide for their own families. What processes have you begun? Big or small, it doesn't matter. Whether you have guided them to safety or taught them about serve and return, you have altered their path. Whether these connections/resources are achieved quickly or slowly over a long time, it's most likely that your heart, hands and maybe your patience were involved in making the connections for your families. I know you have allowed yourself, for

a tiny moment, to think, what if I hadn't been in their life, where would they be now? Yes, yes, most of us are poor self-promoters, but how would you answer that question?

Sometimes the connections are manipulated, and sometimes they happen naturally. In spite of your self-doubts that will plague you from time to time, you patiently continue to remind, encourage and motivate parents to connect to the people and places that can provide positive outcomes and changes. And you continue to celebrate the successes and see the smiles of gratitude. In person, they can be so agreeable and cooperative, and the next visit show disinterest and forgetfulness. But you might look at the baby and think, if not me, then who else can make the connections? Then you may remember the trauma workshop that you recently attended and that got you to thinking. What is your relationship like with the family? Have you established enough trust to talk about the tough stuff? Have you created personal boundaries for yourself in this relationship? The risk factors in families can be as common as dandelions or as unique as snowflakes. There are times when it is difficult to wait for families to come to the conclusion that you immediately see so clearly. Is their vision for the future different than your vision? And if you feel stuck, you might ask yourself a coaching question: What would it take to ...?

Whatever the circumstance, it is important to remember one last, but not the least, important connection. And that is the one you have with yourself.

Are you practising the self-care you so often remind others about? Can you still find your sense of humour? What are the important connections in your world? ■

Beth Broad is a family support worker with the Wild Rose Community Connections, Okotoks, Alberta.

Fathering Forward: Connecting With Your Kids

By Kyle Campiou

Perceptions and expectations of the typical father have changed dramatically over the last decades. The iconic image of the stoic, macho male figure - bread-earner, father knows best - has been dispelled and shown to be a “Hollywood” myth. The modern image of a grounded, nurturing father has become the newly-evolved expectation. But, not all fathers have had role models or access to this new ideal, or know how to become that person without abandoning their self-perception. Here are some ways a dad can be more involved with his children and evolve in the process.

Unconditional positive regard

For starters, it is important for dads to present with an attitude of acceptance, forgiveness and grace whenever a child makes a mistake, has an accident or performs in non-expected ways. Everyone has an idea of who they would like

their children to become. Rarely does that match the reality of who the child becomes. You might have dreamed your child would be an athlete, but instead is into art, computers or dance and has found unique passions and skills. To evolve as a father, you must abandon your projections and respect your child’s dreams. Nurture and support them. Show your positive regard, no matter what.

Unflinching commitment

Kids are always watching and listening, even when you think they aren’t. Being a father is not a part-time position regardless of how much or little time you have. When you are with your kids, be there completely. Be an unflinching source of stability to your family. You are the strength they look to for security and hope.

Be real

Talk to your kids with an open demeanor and never in a condescending tone. Asking questions and keeping your communication open eliminates many potential issues. Keep yourself real by being as honest as you can with every conversation at every possible chance. Share stories from your childhood as examples and let your children ask questions. By being open and

positive with your responses, you will appear credible and authentic.

Affection

Children thrive when they know they’re loved, and they need lots of it. So, hug your children every day. When they’re near, invite them to ask you for hugs. Sharing big bear hugs lets them know you’re connected. This can be difficult for some men, and it gets increasingly harder the older they get. Men have typically been raised to be perceived as a tough guy. Yet, emotions are displayed not only verbally, but also physically with a hug. Remember that when you give a big hug, you get a bigger one back.

Fun!

You do not have to be a clown or try to be funny all the time. However, it helps to find time to connect with your children in a playful, fun-loving spirit. Show you have a great sense of humour and use it often with them. If it’s not your nature, then use warmth. Ask your kids to share their humour and smile to put them at ease. A big smile and open humour will often lighten unknown or unseen tension and stress.

One-on-one time

Daddy-and-me times provide the greatest memories. Spend some quality time alone with each of your children. It keeps your children from competing for attention and feeling lost. One-on-one time helps both you and your child to get to know each other’s likes and dislikes. Your support can help your children find their own passions and develop their uniqueness.

Be there

Spend time now with your children because it can’t be made up later. The time you put in now has a huge growth factor with pay-offs in life later. Be at their events, no matter how small or big. They are all big to your kids. They want you there the most. Sometimes life will not always let you attend their activities, but make the effort to attend as many as you can. Take pictures and celebrate by giving big hugs.

We are a community raising our children together, so we must aim to be fully involved and connected with them. ■

Kyle Campiou, is the provincial coordinator for the Alberta Father Involvement (AFI). He can be reached at www.abdads.ca.



A Success Story: Making Connections Through Home Visitation



Seven months ago in my role as a family support worker, I began an incredible journey with a family, leading the way on an adventure that superseded all the stigmas and limiting beliefs society had placed upon them.

The immediate family includes a father, mother, grandparent, infant and school-aged child. The school-aged child was in kinship care, and the family was working with Child and Family Services (CFS) to return the child back into their care. The barriers this family encountered at the beginning of home visitation involvement were multi-faceted: grief and loss, homelessness, drug use, negative coping skills, trauma and abuse, low self-esteem, enmeshed boundaries, CFS involvement, poverty and disabilities.

This mom identified that all her life she has been seeking love, belonging and acceptance. She had been told by her mother, teachers and peers that she was stupid or not worthy of belonging. Outside professional assessments indicated she will always need the support of her partner and her partner's parent, and that her being labeled with a cognitive disability had serious impacts on her ability to parent. Society had labeled her and the situation seemed hopeless.

I have had the wonderful opportunity to get to know this family. During our first initial visits, the mom sat disengaged as family members spoke about her as if she were not present. My supervisor and I established boundaries within the home by stating home visitation's purpose; to support parents to become empowered in their parenting role. Boundaries within the home were a continued focus by always asking this mom her opinion and beliefs. Listening with empathy, curiosity and non-judgment ultimately created a "paradigm shift" within the family dynamics. Over time, dad and the paternal parent started to trust and support mom in her growth.

One of the requirements set out by CFS was to attend counseling. This mom stated she had not had any success with counselors. She shared that she learns best through visuals. When the family support worker asked her if she would be interested in attending art therapy, she lit up with excitement and was eager to be referred. Our agency worked with CSD to ensure the identified financial barrier was resolved. The partnership with CSD was a positive collaborative effort using a "client-centered approach." This opened communication and eliminated overlapping services.

What makes this a success story?

Today, this mom has accomplished more than what society (family, professionals and peers) ever expected or believed she could do. She

- is engaged, willing and enthusiastic during our home visits
- is open to trying new things, such as play groups with her children
- initiates games, reading and playing with her children
- participates in doing the cooking, laundry and dishes
- shares about the impact of drugs and unhealthy relationships
- continues to practise setting boundaries with her friends and family
- shares struggles encountered between home visits and how she appropriately handled them on her own
- reflects on situations she feels she handled well and where she could improve

Together, the family has brainstormed expectations on what family values they want to live by: accepting differences, talking in a calm voice (not yelling) and always being yourself. This mom has a new way to cope with her anger using art instead of yelling. The process has resulted in an art piece titled "House with Words."

The family provided an opportunity for "all involved" to experience the value of connection and the importance of belonging and acceptance. Through building relationships and connecting with the family where they are at, stigmas slowly begin to lose their power. This is a success story of a family in the home visitation program that overcame many challenges and adversities and is now empowered to face what is yet to come.

Dr. Brene Brown writes: "The truth is, rarely can a response make something better – what makes something better is connection." ■

Both the author and the client have chosen to remain anonymous for privacy purposes.

DISCONNECTED

By Jessica Vanderzee

In home visitation, we put a huge emphasis on building relationships. We talk about it, take training on it and try to practise it. Sometimes, it can be challenging to figure out exactly how to establish that connection.

Jenna was the first parent I ever worked with in the Healthy Families program. Her previous visitor had left for another job, and when I became associated with Jenna, she had been in the program for just under a year. I never got the chance to speak to her home visitor and swap notes, ask questions or find out what worked for Jenna. We got off to a very rocky start as I navigated my new position and Jenna navigated life, including figuring out how to get by in Canada. The first time I met her, she was living in a women's shelter to escape intimate partner violence. She was in the middle of a crisis with a worker she did not know or trust. I was completely at a loss for how to start building that relationship. There was just so much to do. Jenna and I struggled our first year working together,

but now, looking back, I am grateful that neither of us gave up.

It can be easy to forget the 'soft' skills of our trade such as relationship building, active listening and reflection. With Jenna, there constantly seemed to be some crisis or another and so I prioritized practical goals over our relationship, until I found that it wasn't working for either of us. What finally worked was when I set my papers aside and took an interest in Jenna herself.

With a primary caseload of immigrant and refugee families, I developed a learning tool (see next article, Learning Culture) that aimed to increase my knowledge of their backgrounds and stories. When I first mentioned the series of cultural questions, I saw Jenna light up. We dedicated almost two hours to this learning tool and she was excited, willing and honoured to take the role of teacher for a visit. She shared with me where she had come from and more of her story than I found in her file. This was the turning point for our relationship, the moment when we became less worker vs client, and more two people with different strengths and life experiences. The power dynamic shifted, and we connected on a new level.

I began to see her resiliency, determination and the effects of the trauma she had suffered from her home country. A better picture of Jenna's life was forming, and I found myself truly looking forward to our visits. My work also became more effective. Jenna kept more home visit appointments, talked more and told me what she needed. Two years from that first meeting together, Jenna is excelling. She left behind an abusive relationship, found her own home and made it a safe and happy place for her son. Jenna has a job and is attending counselling to begin the healing process from years of trauma and has a plan for her future.

When we are able to truly connect to our families and work holistically, everything else we do is that much more effective. There is a trust established that tells our families everything we do is for their good, and we care about who they are. Jenna is an incredible example of what happens when a resilient person receives the support they need, and relationships are always at their best when we connect. ■

Jessica Vanderzee, RSW is a home visitor at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society Edmonton, AB.



Learning Culture: A Tool for Communication and Understanding

By Jessica Vanderzee

This learning culture activity is intended to be educational for the home visitor, and should only be done with the family's permission, if they are willing. Share these questions with your family the week prior to your visit, so they can read and prepare their answers. Learning about culture is intended to be enjoyable. Ensure your clients understand this is not 'work' or an exam for the family to complete. It is to help you understand their culture. Encourage your families to wear their traditional clothing, prepare traditional foods, etc. for this learning opportunity. Some of the items in parentheses may be for home visitors use depending on the family you are working with. You may choose to not include some of the questions in the questionnaire for the family members.

When used effectively, this tool can open up many doors for communication and discussion. Families are given the opportunity to share where they are from and how it has shaped where they are now. Families are also shown that their visitor cares about what is important to them. Visitors are strongly encouraged to use information provided by the family to help guide future interactions and activities.



Questions

How do people greet each other in your culture? (verbally, handshakes, gestures) (Can you teach me?)

What are your traditional family roles? (Is it a matriarchal or patriarchal culture? Is there an emphasis on elders? What is the role of children and their importance?)

How do you celebrate holidays? What holidays do you observe?

What is your religion or belief? (Tell me what that means to you.)

What do relationships look like? Is there a certain way that people go about meeting, dating, getting engaged, married? What does affection and care look like?

What are some traditional foods you enjoy? How do you serve them? (Are there protocols for eating? Shared dishes, special utensils, eating together, etc.)

How do you show respect/disrespect in your culture? (Bowing, offering gifts/ pointing, staring, gestures, etc.)

What is considered taboo?

How are children raised? (Means of discipline, rites of passage, within larger family or immediate family).

What would be traditional clothing/attire? Is there a special dress for events (births, weddings, funerals) or celebrations (religious holidays, etc.)?

In Canada, we strive for communities where differences are not only acknowledged, but CELEBRATED. Look for ways to include cultural learning in agency events to promote diversity and help mitigate assumptions, stereotypes and ignorance. ■

Jessica Vanderzee, RSW, is a home visitor at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society in Edmonton, AB.



connections

Coming up

The next issue of Connections newsletter will focus on Working with Indigenous Families. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by December 14, 2017.

Hearing from you

Connections is published two times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any comments to Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA provincial director, by phone at 780.429.4787 or by email to info@ahvna.org.

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Mind Over Matter: Connecting With Your Environment

By Andrea Marson

Over the last few decades, we have seen an explosion in consumerism on a scale never witnessed previously. It is one of the great conundrums of our age. We invent, produce, sell and buy more and more; yet many of us are still unhappy and feeling less connected to other people. So, how can having more stuff make us less happy and isolated, and what can we do about it?

Getting organized is a very trendy topic these days, no doubt due to the sheer number of possessions that people now collect in modern life. Television shows and magazines make it all sound so simple – buy new storage containers, throw a few things away, add some labels, and abracadabra you are organized forever more. Yet all too often this approach to “getting organized” is only a temporary band-aid. We start a big tidy up only to lose motivation part way through; then in a matter of days the piles start to build up again, with more storage containers added to the mess. We rarely stop to properly consider the items that we invite into our homes and offices and the negative consequences these items can bring to our families and our workplaces.

How does having more stuff make us feel unhappy and disconnected? The truth lies in understanding that the greater the amount of stuff you choose to own not only reduces the amount of physical space around you, but can also limit the amount of free space in your mind for the things that really matter – family, friends and spending time doing what you love.

Just take a moment and look around the room you are in. How many individual items can you see? How many items should be somewhere else? Are there items you no longer use or that are broken and need throwing away? Maybe there are items you are waiting to give to a friend or to take to a donation centre. Each of these items represents something you need to do in your mind – a bullet point in your subconscious to-do list. As you look around the room again, imagine that every single one of these items takes a small piece of energy from you every single time you look at it. Think how much energy you could save if you were only surrounded by energy-neutral objects that you intentionally need or that bring you joy. I believe that the true path to feeling happier, more connected and organized is not just about having less stuff, but in ensuring that we make more intentional choices about the objects we surround ourselves with.

Now imagine yourself in a room surrounded by items that you have chosen. Every single item has a purpose in your space or is a reminder of a positive memory. You have a feeling of calm, peace and possibility. Creating an energy-neutral space, that is not subconsciously sapping you of energy, allows your mind the time and space to relax, to focus on work or simply to enjoy being with your family. Being surrounded by less allows us to truly see ourselves, others and our lives with more clarity and understanding. Our best work is achieved and our happiest memories are formed when we are in a state of “flow.” That is only possible where there is neutral energy, so our minds are free to be open and creative and we can be fully present with others. ■

Andrea Marson is a member of the Professional Organizers in Canada (POC) and owner of Live Life Organized, based in Sherwood Park at www.livelifeorganized.ca.



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