



## **What is Healthy Families Florida?**

Healthy Families Florida is a statewide, nationally accredited, voluntary home visiting program that is proven to prevent child abuse and neglect before it ever starts. The program is modeled after Healthy Families America, an evidence-based initiative of Prevent Child Abuse America. Healthy Families America is recognized by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as an “effective prevention program, demonstrating empirical findings using a sound conceptual framework and an evaluation design of high-quality.” Healthy Families is also acknowledged as a successful and proven program by the Rand Corporation, a non-profit institution that addresses the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

## **What do we do?**

Effective parenting takes more than love, it takes skill. Sadly, many parents today do not have the opportunity to learn effective parenting skills. This is where Healthy Families Florida steps in. The program equips parents and other caregivers with the knowledge and skills they need to increase protective factors so that their children can grow up healthy, safe, nurtured, free from abuse and neglect, and ready to succeed in school and in life.

Trained home visitors provide parents and other caregivers information, guidance and emotional and practical support by:

- Modeling positive parent-child interaction to enhance their child’s development.
- Providing education on child health and development and the importance of immunizations and well-baby check-ups.
- Teaching about safe and unsafe sleeping environments for infants, coping with crying and other prevention topics.
- Screening children for developmental delays.
- Screening for maternal depression.
- Identifying and connecting families with natural support systems such as family, friends, neighbors, faith-based organizations.
- Connecting families to medical providers and making referrals to other community services.
- Teaching how to recognize and address child safety hazards in and around the home, in the car, in and around water and in other environments.
- Helping to develop appropriate problem-solving skills and identify positive ways to manage stress.
- Promoting personal responsibility for their future and the future of their families by helping them to set and achieve goals, such as furthering their education and acquiring stable employment.

## Who do we serve?

Research shows that the key to preventing child abuse and neglect is intervening early during pregnancy or shortly after the birth of a baby. Healthy Families services begin during pregnancy or within three months of a baby's birth and can last for up to five years depending on the unique needs of each family. Healthy Families uses a validated assessment tool to determine which families are experiencing a variety of difficult circumstances that place their children at high risk for abuse and neglect and other adverse outcomes that are preventable through intensive home visiting services.

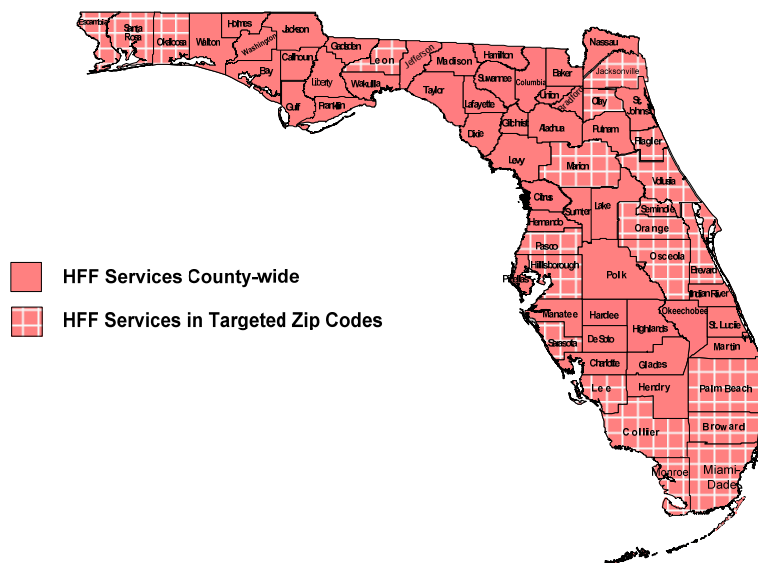
Most Healthy Families participants are low-income single parents with less than a high school education and little awareness of appropriate discipline options for their children. Participants often experienced abuse or neglect during childhood.

Other common participant risk factors include:

- Late or inadequate prenatal care
- Multiple children under five years of age
- Prior involvement with Child Protection Services
- Inappropriate coping mechanisms
- Current maternal depression or history of mental illness
- Unrealistic expectations about child development
- Limited contact with close friends and/or family
- History of, or current, domestic violence or other abuse
- Raised in an unstable home
- History of, or current, substance abuse

Healthy Families services are available in all of Florida's 67 counties; in some throughout the entire county and in others only in targeted high-risk zip code areas (See Figure 2). During the 2008-2009 fiscal year, Healthy Families Florida served 12,903 families with 21,430 children.

**Figure 2: Healthy Families Service Areas**



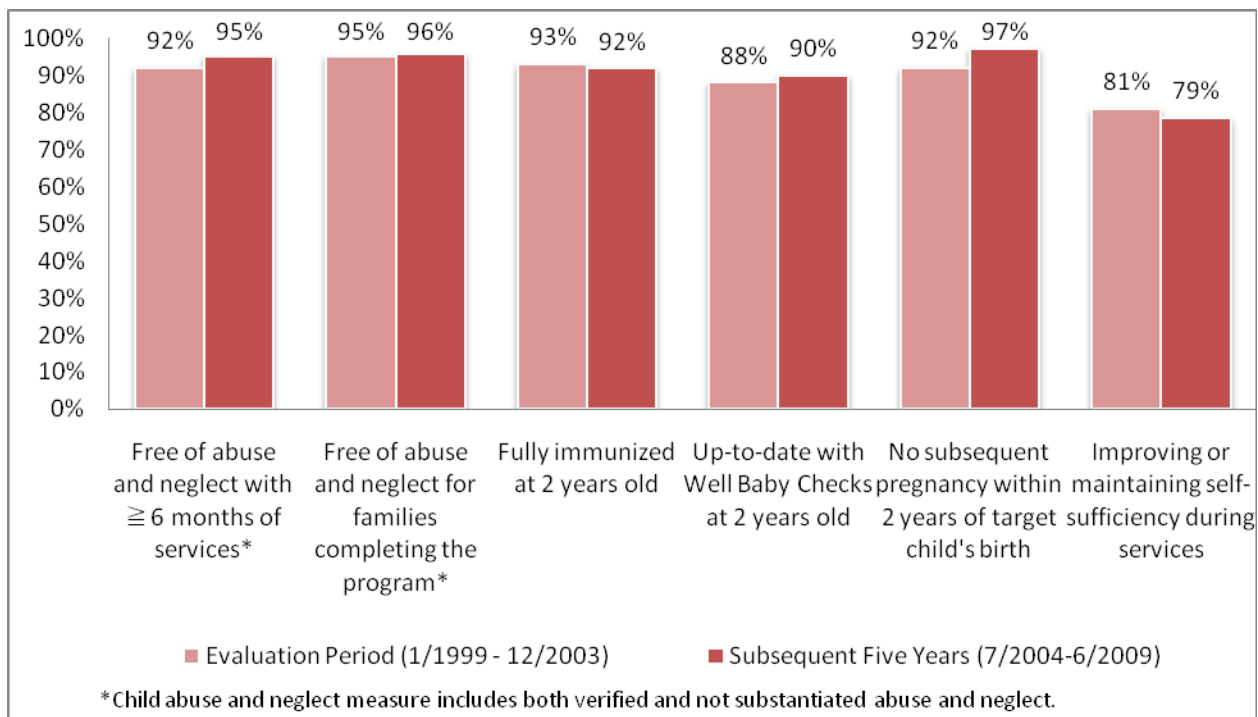
## How do we know it works?

An independent rigorous five-year evaluation concluded that Healthy Families Florida has a significant impact on preventing child abuse and neglect in Florida's highest-risk families. The comparison study shows that children in families who received intensive Healthy Families services experienced 58 percent less child abuse and neglect than families who received little or no Healthy Families services. Evaluators also concluded that Healthy Families services improve maternal and child health, parent-child interaction and increase family self-sufficiency:

- 92 percent of mothers participating in Healthy Families Florida did not have a subsequent pregnancy within two years. Baby spacing decreases the risk that mothers will experience medical complications or give birth to low-birth-weight or premature babies.
- 81 percent of participants who completed the program improved their education level, received job training or became gainfully employed while enrolled in the program. By increasing their self-sufficiency, parents improve their ability to provide for their children and develop greater confidence in their parenting abilities.
- Mothers who participated in Healthy Families Florida for three or more years were significantly more likely to read to their children. Parent-child interaction, stimulation and reading are important for healthy child development and future success in school and in life.

Healthy Families Florida has sustained remarkably high performance since its inception in 1998, as illustrated in Figure 3 which compares the initial five-year independent evaluation report results to ongoing evaluation results in the subsequent five-year period (an average of FY 2004-2005 through FY 2008-2009).

**Figure 3: Healthy Families Florida Performance**



## Key Elements for Ongoing Program Success

- Services are voluntary, which empowers families to make positive changes in their behaviors and the way they lead their lives.
- Home visits are frequent and long-term. Families start out with weekly visits for at least six months. As families progress in establishing stable, safe and nurturing environments for their children, the frequency of the visits decreases to bi-weekly, then monthly, then quarterly.
- Services are available during non-traditional hours, including evenings and Saturdays, to accommodate families' work and school schedules.

- Intensive training prepares staff for their roles and responsibilities and helps them succeed in their work with families.
- Weekly supervision allows supervisors to review the progress of families with staff, provide guidance and clinical support and develop the skills of the home visitors.
- Low caseloads allow home visitors to spend the time they need to meet the individual needs of each high-risk family.
- A strong statewide system that includes a central office that provides annual quality assurance visits to ensure accountability and fidelity to the Healthy Families program model; ongoing technical assistance and training; fiscal oversight and data management; and ongoing evaluation that identifies progress toward measurable outcomes and areas in need of improvement or change.
- Strong community partnerships provide families with additional services such as child care, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment and domestic violence intervention.

## **A Healthy Families Success Story**

“When I came into this program, I was a mess with no direction and no purpose. I was using drugs and stealing. I was 22 years old, suffering from depression and had no idea of what it meant to be a good mom or person. My family was not very supportive and I lost custody of my first son. I was given the chance back then to clean up my act but had no one to guide or support me.

It was not until I became pregnant with my second son that this lady with Healthy Families Florida showed up at my door. She helped me gain self confidence and the courage to fight the depression and bad things going on in my life. She showed me how to be a good mom. She referred me for mental health counseling, encouraged me to look for a job, to go back to school, to set goals for myself. I am proud to say that today, almost five years later, I have achieved every one of those goals and met every challenge.

Healthy Families Florida taught me that I do not have to be a victim; that I can be an asset for myself, for my son and for my community. I obtained my driver’s license, bought a car, applied for housing and now have my own apartment. I love to write poetry, and I hope someday to open my own soul food restaurant. I have Healthy Families Florida to thank for this.

The program and my home visitor taught me how to become a better person, a better mom and a productive citizen, and for this, I am very grateful.”

*Healthy Families Florida Graduate, October 2008*