

# Providing Holistic Support to At-Risk Parents and Children in High Point

## Parents as Teachers Program – YWCA High Point

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### Summary

Since 2016, the Foundation for a Healthy High Point has provided funding to YWCA High Point to support its Adolescent Parenting Program. In 2020, YWCA transitioned from the Partners for Healthy Babies curriculum to Parents as Teachers (PAT), which is a national, evidence-based, early childhood curriculum and home visiting program to strengthen supports for high-risk families. The program's goals are to improve birth outcomes, increase parents' knowledge of child development and appropriate parenting skills, identify and refer families to needed resources and services, and prevent child abuse and neglect.

### Highlights

- In the first 18 months of the new curriculum, funding from the Foundation supported a PAT parent educator to serve 13 families through monthly or bi-monthly home visits and group meetings, over half of whom were in the neediest area of High Point.
- Funding from the Foundation provided critical start-up and capacity building support which enabled the YWCA to seek additional state funding and grow the program from two to six parent educators in less than two years.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, parent educators transitioned to virtual support, ensuring families access to the resources they needed during a challenging time.
- The original two-year grant supported 22 young women who could not otherwise be supported through state funding.

### Funding

The Foundation for a Healthy High Point provided \$80,000 to YWCA High Point to fund the implementation of the Parents as Teachers program between July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2022. In 2016, the Foundation provided \$118,000 to support two years of the Partners for Healthy Babies program, an adolescent parenting program previously supported by the state. The YWCA's Adolescent Parenting Program is also supported by funding from the United Way, the NC Department of Health and Human Services, and donations to YWCA High Point.



*The Foundation for a Healthy High Point encourages, supports, influences, and invests in efforts that improve the long-term health and wellness throughout Greater High Point. We accomplish this by examining health issues and identifying and investing in evidence-based practices.*

# Background

YWCA High Point states its mission is “eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.” Since its establishment in 1920, YWCA High Point has been a champion for women and families in High Point through providing opportunities for women and girls to develop leadership skills, achieve physical wellness, build job skills, and become effective parents. YWCA High Point has seven core programs: Youth Services, Social Justice, Women’s Resource Center, Latino Family Center, Aquatics & Wellness, and Maternal Health.

In 2020, YWCA High Point adopted the Parents as Teachers curriculum to support families as part of their Maternal Health programming. Initial funding from the Foundation supported one parent educator to provide the Parents as Teachers program to at-risk High Point families that could not be supported by state dollars. This funding not only filled a gap in services provided by the state, it also provided critical start-up and capacity building support which enabled the YWCA to leverage additional funding opportunities to build and expand the program. As of July 1, 2021, the YWCA had grown the program from two to four PAT parent educators, and in September of 2021 added a fifth parent educator and one Lead Parent Educator.

Prior to adopting Parents as Teachers, the YWCA provided Partners for Healthy Babies, a multi-faceted program modeled after state guidelines to provide support and services to pregnant and parenting adolescents. Grant funding from the Foundation supported 22 young women to participate who were not otherwise eligible to be supported by state funding.

# Need

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, High Point’s 27260 zip code is the 4<sup>th</sup> poorest zip code in North Carolina. Over 70% of residences in the 27260 zip code are single-mother households living below the poverty level with children under the age of five. The average household income in the area is about \$25,000 per year. The Parents as Teachers program strives to increase young parents’ skills and knowledge about parenting and provide resources to support families to break through the cycle of poverty. Providing a solid foundation for babies and young children will lead to future educational attainment and economic stability.

# Project Description

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a national, evidence-based program, developed in the 1980s by the Missouri Department of Education. The curriculum is designed to help “parents embrace their important role as their child’s first and best teacher.” The program is founded on the belief that early detection and intervention of developmental delays and health issues will improve school readiness. The program’s mission is to “promote optimal early development, learning, and health of children by supporting their parents and caregivers.”



YWCA High Point is an affiliate of the national Parents as Teachers program. The program utilizes funding from the Foundation for a Healthy High Point to support a parent educator to work with up to 15 pregnant teens or young parents. Families are eligible to stay in the program until the child turns 5 years old. The program is intended to focus on families living in the 27260 zip code; however, it also serves families in Greater High Point. The parent educator implements the Parents as Teachers program curriculum through monthly, or more frequent home visits for families with greater needs, and monthly group meetings.

The goals of Parents as Teachers program include:

- healthy pregnancy and birth outcomes,
- increased knowledge of age-appropriate child development, including language, cognitive, social-emotional, and motor development,
- early identification and referral to services for health or development delays, and
- prevention of child abuse and neglect.

The program strives to avoid unplanned pregnancies, assist parents in accessing health care for their family, enhance parenting abilities, increase job search and employment skills, and prevent child abuse and neglect. PAT parent educators encourage parents to set goals to help guide the content of their home visits. These goals are reviewed throughout the program to ensure the program is meeting parents' needs.



YWCA staff received extensive, ongoing training in implementing the Parents as Teacher program to ensure program fidelity. Case management data are entered into the PAT national database, monitored by the Maternal Health Director and others at the YWCA and PAT national to ensure the program meets its goals.

The relationship between the parent educator and participating parent is deep and lasting. Establishing a trusted relationship is important to the success of the program. Children spend more time at home than elsewhere in the community, particularly the youngest children. Home visits allow parent educators to monitor safety concerns in the home environment and observe the dynamic between parent and child. Trust is gained through repeated visits. As YWCA staff stated, “the PAT program is strength-based. It’s cool to see things that parents do with their children.”

The YWCA is connected with other organizations focusing on improving birth outcomes and healthy parenting in High Point. These connections result in referrals from partners who identify participants for the program. Community navigators with the Ready for School, Ready for Life collaborative also refer potential participants to the PAT program.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions for PAT families and educators. Fortunately, the national PAT program had already been exploring virtual services. The national office provided pandemic briefs, information on how to conduct virtual visits well, and other guidance about safely providing the program during the pandemic. While participants and educators encountered challenges, particularly technology issues such as wifi bandwidth and device issues, the program continued to persevere.



*Parent Educator and PAT Family meet virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic*

## Results

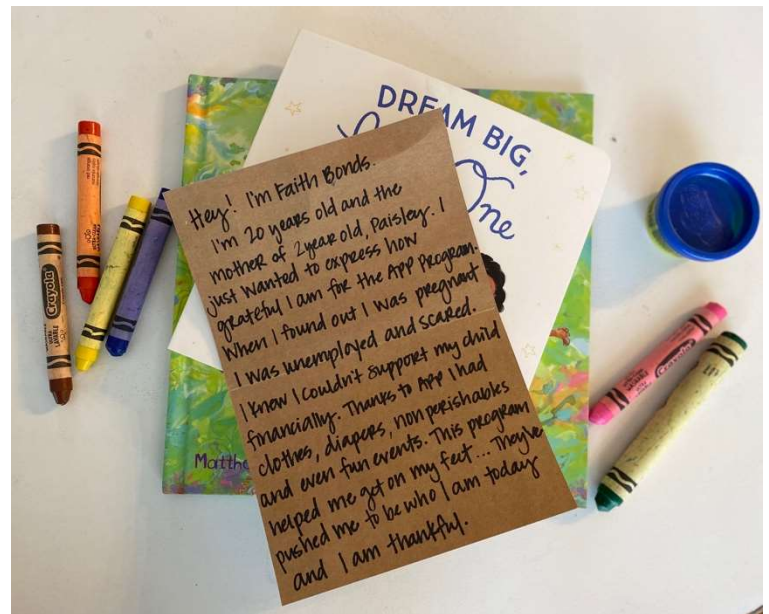
The YWCA High Point has overcome multiple challenges while establishing the Parents as Teachers program, including the inability to meet in person during the pandemic, staff turnover, and the lack of availability for PAT trainings for new staff prior to seeing families. In the first 18 months of the program, funding from the Foundation supported 13 families to participate in visits with a parent educator. Seven of the 13 families live in the 27260 zip code, the area of highest priority for the initiative. Many families have multiple children, all of whom benefit from the program.

Independent evaluation studies have found evidence that the Parents as Teachers model effectively changes the lives of participating families. PAT parents show increased levels of positive parenting knowledge, behavior, and attitudes. PAT families are more likely to promote children's language and literacy, including reading to their children and taking them to the library. PAT parents are more involved in their children's schooling through enrolling their children in preschool, attending parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering in their children's schools. Additionally, PAT children are five times more likely to be fully immunized and more likely to attend well-child visits with their doctors. PAT families have 50% fewer cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

The following success story was shared by YWCA Maternal Health Director, Mary Beth Foust:

“One of our moms set a goal to go back to school to complete her bachelor’s degree. She is still enrolled at UNCG with a young son and an elementary-aged daughter. We worked with her to think through childcare arrangements and act as an accountability partner in the process.”

## Lessons Learned



- **The Parents as Teachers program complements and extends other community home visiting programs.** While the Nurse Family Partnership and Guilford Family Connects programs are also home visiting programs for new parents, they differ in intensity of intervention or use of nurses as opposed to parent educators and some community members may prefer one approach to another. As part of the Healthy Beginnings initiative, and through coordination with Ready for School, Ready for Life, these three programs have developed systems to prevent a duplication of services and refer to each other for tailored support. For example, NFP nurses may refer families who complete their program to the PAT program for deep and sustained support.
- **Staffing continuity is important when a program model depends on building trusting relationships.** One of the YWCA’s parent educators left her position within a year of being hired as she discovered the position wasn’t a good fit for her. This led to a loss in program participants who discontinued participation when the educator left. Hiring educators who understand the jobs and are committed to the position is essential for building a successful initiative.
- **The Parents as Teachers program has high administrative, training, and evaluation demands.** YWCA staff report that the educators are required by the national office to prepare for visits, complete paperwork after each visit, and engage in professional development and evaluation. These components are needed to ensure program fidelity and outcome achievement, but that results in the number of participants being relatively smaller than other home visitation programs working on the population level.
- **Funding from the Foundation for a Healthy High Point served as a catalyst for securing additional maternal health funding.** While the Foundation’s funding only supported one PAT parent educator, it also helped create an infrastructure for the YWCA to build its capacity and seek additional funding. Following the Foundation’s start-up funding, the YWCA obtained multiple multi-year state grants to support the expansion of the program which grew from two to six staff including a Lead Parent Educator.