

# SMART START PILOT GRANTS

## The Incredible Years: BASIC Parent Training—Early Childhood

### May 2008 Evaluation Report

Joy Sotolongo, The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc.

Iheoma U. Iruka, FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-Chapel Hill

Kelly Maxwell, FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-Chapel Hill



### Overview of the Smart Start Pilot Grant Program

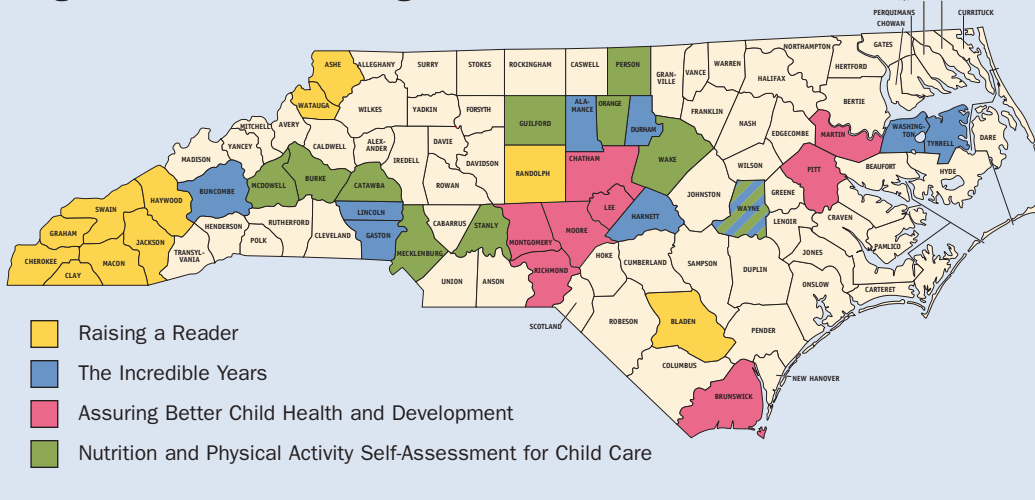
The Smart Start Pilot Grant Program targets four critical issues facing young children and their families (see Table 1). To address these critical issues with limited resources, Smart Start adopted a strategic, high-impact approach by piloting evidence-based programs in a diverse range of communities across the state. To be selected, programs needed to: (1) be innovative, (2) produce clearly defined child or family outcomes, and (3) have the potential to become a state-wide model (see Table 1 for list of programs).

**Table 1. Critical Issues and Pilot Programs**

Critical Early Childhood Issue	Smart Start Pilot Grant Program
Reduce childhood obesity	Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC)
Identify children with developmental delays or concerns	Assuring Better Child Health and Development
Improve children's pre-reading skills	Raising a Reader
Increase parenting skills that address children's challenging behaviors	The Incredible Years: BASIC Parent Training Program—Early Childhood



**Figure 1. Counties Receiving 2007–2008 Pilot Grants**



**Scope**

This report focuses on the Incredible Years: BASIC Parent Training—Early Childhood (referred to as the Incredible Years) Pilot Grant program and provides information about the program and its participants, lessons learned, and next steps.

**Table 2. Location of Incredible Years Groups**

County	Number of Families
Alamance	10
Buncombe	11
Durham	10
Harnett	10
Lincoln and Gaston	7
Wayne	11

Note: Tyrell and Washington counties will begin offering services in FY 2008–2009.

**Description of the Incredible Years Program**

Social and behavioral skills are critical factors in young children’s development and school readiness. An estimated 13 of every 1,000 children enrolled in North Carolina’s pre-kindergarten programs are expelled.<sup>1</sup> Behavioral issues continue to be a critical issue in older children, where 216 of every 1,000 children enrolled in grades K-12 are suspended.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to support positive social and behavioral development in young children, Smart Start implemented the Incredible Years program. The Incredible Years has been effective in reducing children’s aggression and behavioral problems in early childhood classrooms and at home.<sup>3</sup> The Incredible Years program provides 14 weeks of group training for parents, with an emphasis on positive parenting strategies that promote children’s social skills.

The intended outcomes for the Incredible Years program are: (1) an increase in the number of children demonstrating social competence, and (2) an increase in the number of parents using positive parenting strategies, such as effective limit-setting.

**Participants**

- So far, the Incredible Years has reached 59 families and children between the ages of 2 and 5 years in six counties (see Table 2).
- 53% of children are in homes where the family income per year is less than \$30,000.
- 25% of parents reported an education level of high school or less.

1. Foundation for Child Development. (2005). *Preschools left behind: Expulsion rates in state pre-kindergarten systems.*  
 2. Action for Children NC. (2007). *Short-term suspensions; long-term consequences; real life solutions.*  
 3. Webster-Stratton, C. (1998). Preventing conduct problems in Head Start children: Strengthening parenting competencies. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66*(5), 715-730

## Parents' Behavioral Management and Children's Behavior and Social Skills Before the Incredible Years Program

Before parents began participating in the Incredible Years, they completed two surveys in January 2008. The two measures were the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory™ (ECBI™), which measures children's behavioral and social competence, and the Parent Practices Interview (PPI), which assesses parenting practices related to managing a child's behavior. Highlights of children's behavior and parents' behavioral management practices prior to the Incredible Years intervention are:

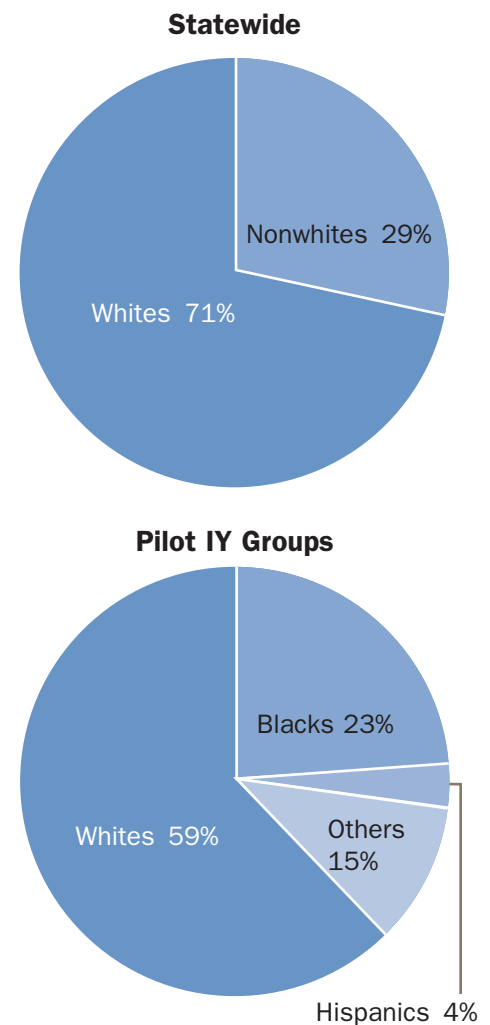
- The average score for children's behavioral and social competence was 62.0 before the program began, with a range of 43 to 79. Higher scores indicate more problem behaviors.
  - 81% of parents reported that their children had higher than normal behavioral problems.
- The PPI assesses parents' positive parenting skills. Scores can range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more sensitive parenting. The average score for *positive parenting* practices was 4.6, with a range of 3.4 to 6.2.
- The PPI assesses how consistent parents are in how they manage their child's behavior. Scores can range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more inconsistent parenting. The average score for *inconsistent parenting* practices was 3.3, with a range of 1.5 to 5.5.
- The PPI assesses parents' use of harsh discipline. Scores can range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more negative parenting. Parents, on average, reported slightly less use of harsh discipline practices. The average score for *harsh discipline* practices was 2.9, with a range of 1.1 to 6.1.

## Lessons Learned

During the first six months of implementing the Incredible Years Pilot Grant Program, The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc., noted the following lessons:

- In order for parents to learn about and enroll in the program, Incredible Years needs to be implemented by agencies that are known as a respected source of information and support for families. Grant sites where the implementing agency had a history of developing trusting relationships with families had little difficulty recruiting the minimum number of parents needed for the group.
- Approximately two months are needed to effectively recruit parents for the program.

**Figure 2.**  
Ethnicity of Children,  
Statewide and in IY Groups



## Success Story

A mother in Durham described the following experience to her Incredible Years group leaders:

“When I came to this class I wanted help with my daughter who was kicking, lying, hitting and throwing fits at home and at school. During the course of these classes, I learned skills that I use at home. The change in my daughter at home and at pre-school is only short of a miracle. My daughter’s teacher has noted the positive changes in her daily log.

“I see changes not only in my child but in myself as well. I have patience and skills other than yelling and corporal discipline. I really like the presentations, materials, and facilitators. I am able to hear and share with other parents. I realize I am not alone.”

- Parents reported that, because the program provided supports such as child care, meals, or transportation, they were able to attend the weekly meetings.
- In rural areas, travel time to weekly meetings can be a barrier to participation for many families. In some cases, the 30- to 60-minute trip to arrive at the meeting site, coupled with the meeting time, made for a very long day for families and their young children. In these rural areas, a group-based program may be more difficult to implement.
- Due to the limited number of trainers available from the Incredible Years national office, group leaders were unable to attend training until February. There was little time for group leaders to become familiar with the curriculum before starting the groups. They will be more familiar with the curriculum when working with the second cohort of parents.

## Plans for Fiscal Year 2008–2009

Parents currently involved in the Incredible Years Pilot Grant Program will continue attending weekly meetings through May 2008. Data about child and parent behaviors will be collected after parents complete the Incredible Years program. These data collected after the intervention has ended will help determine whether the program was effective in improving children’s behavior skills and increasing parenting skills. Results will be reported in September 2008. Information gleaned from this first group of participants will be used to inform practices with the second group of parents. The second group of parents will begin receiving services in late summer of 2008.

Smart Start thanks  
**Duke Energy**  
for investing in the  
Incredible Years program.

For more information about the Smart Start Pilot Grant Program, contact Vivian Muzyk (919) 821-9571 [vmuzyk@ncsmartstart.org](mailto:vmuzyk@ncsmartstart.org).

