



HIPPYUSA
Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters

HIPPY USA- LEAP Pilot Report- 3
Home Visitor Focus Groups

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Evaluation Report- LEAP Pilot

Home Visitor Focus Groups

Summary

The HIPPY USA LEAP program has articulated a mission that focuses on improving service delivery through helping Home Visitors reach their education and career goals. The program provides training, goal development materials, and supports through program Coordinators and the LEAP website. It is informed by a process evaluation and tracking of entries into a HIPPY USA database. The program is being developed by a HIPPY USA Training Manager in collaboration with a Professional Development Specialist and Steering Committee made up of program coordinators.

As part of the process evaluation of the LEAP program, home visitor focus groups from four of the initial pilot sites were conducted to explore the reactions to the introduction of the program.

Recommendations for continuous development and improvement were also derived from the focus group discussions.

Focus group responses indicated that the pilot programs' inauguration was received with curiosity and excitement, as well as hesitancy and anxiety due to a variety of factors. Since its inception, discussions (or further actions) of the LEAP program have been at a standstill as the beginning of the school year and working alongside families has taken precedence. In addition, when

the program was first introduced to home visitors, information and resources on the goal setting process and educational pathways was still in development, and summer break limited home visitors exposure to any further information. However, some participants stated that they were willing to learn more about the program if they knew resources were available and could locate the information quickly and easily.

Home visitors stated that the timing and method of presenting program information and the way in which it is supported by the Coordinators would make a difference in their receptivity and ability to follow through with the LEAP process. For example, it was recommended by multiple home visitors that LEAP be introduced after the home visitors' first year, and during breaks in service delivery, such as at the end of November and/or during the summer.

The following sections highlight some of the main themes and suggestions presented during the focus group sessions with the home visitors. Recommendations are summarized in the last section.

Timeline for LEAP

LEAP introduction and pathway selection process

Home visitors are very dedicated to the families they serve, therefore during the school year it can be challenging to take on additional responsibilities. When it was introduced, LEAP seemed like it would require more time and energy than home visitors could contribute to it, as one participant stated, it felt like “a lot of work coming at me. It was a little overwhelming just because of what is going on in my life”. Another participant’s initial reaction was that “this is going to be a lot of work.”

Some home visitors suggested that the process of completing the goal worksheet, selecting a pathway, and carrying out action steps for the program should be carried out during the summer when they have more time to dedicate to the program and are not working with families. Some also stated that working on LEAP in November or December would be less burdensome, as they are on holiday breaks.

Most participants felt that they did not have access to enough information during the pilot. Many selected the CE pathway simply because they weren’t sure what or how much they were committing themselves to. This included not knowing whether HIPPY would help with any funding (cost commitment) or how much information would be provided that could be easily accessed (time/effort commitment). One participant noted, “If it was going to be easy enough I think I’d go ahead and do it [a CDA]; and it [LEAP] made me think, ‘Hey if I

can get it this quickly and this easily, then sure, why not?’ But it’s the cost and time that’s holding me back, and also lack of information. I feel like I still don’t have enough information to make a decision.” In the future roll-out it will be important to have as much information and resources in place as possible so that home visitors feel like they are making an informed decision as they choose a pathway.

Participants pointed out that the less seasoned home visitors who have recently been hired need time to learn the HIPPY program and complete the initial training, thus it was suggested that new home visitors be introduced to LEAP after their first year in the position. Introducing and orienting home visitors to LEAP in the summer of their second year was recommended.

Access to training

Existing staff development and other associated trainings that might help advance home visitors through the LEAP program were viewed as beneficial by all home visitors. For additional training, the proposed ideal times to attend were November, December, or summer.

Due to the case load volume and time constraints during the school year, several home visitors suggested that availability of a variety of training modalities would help them access and complete the necessary hours for the LEAP program. Some strategies for making trainings more accessible included: placing trainings on the LEAP website, making information on trainings available in home visitors’ immediate geographical areas, shorter

trainings (a few hours or two half days within two weeks) along with a sufficient amount of time to complete the assigned homework, trainings offered as professional development that would also count for the CDA, and webinars offered by HIPPIY USA that would count as training. With the increased accessibility and availability of trainings due to the various modalities and time frames, earning credit hours would be more attainable.

Time to think about goals & process the information

Several of the home visitors proposed extending the amount of time between the introduction of LEAP, selecting a pathway, and completing steps in their chosen pathway. As one home visitor stated, “it takes a lot of re-working of the mind if you’ve been out of school for quite a few years to get back into that mindset. It’s physically and mentally getting into it. Oh, this is what it entails around our family life and around our work life.”

Several participants expressed interest in pursuing educational goals but were doubtful they would be able to do it in their current situations. One participant commented, “My first reaction was that it was helping to educate myself in this field that I’m particularly interested in, that is early childhood education, so it [LEAP] was very helpful to me... but right now it’s time consuming and I really don’t have the time as well as the finances to do this.” This would suggest the need for flexibility in how quickly home visitors would be required to advance through the action steps in their chosen pathway.

It was recommended that the amount of time to develop goals be extended, or introduced in phases, and be more flexible than it was in the pilot. This would allow time for home visitors to carefully consider the objectives of the LEAP program and apply them to their own goals. It would also allow for changes in thinking, which takes time and requires repeated exposure to information. Flexibility in the timeframe would also accommodate home visitors’ planning and strategizing to make needed adjustments in work and family schedules and budgets.

Options for Goals & Pathways

How each pathway fits with the 15 hours of professional development

Home visitors had received information on LEAP from their coordinators in the spring but had not received additional information or checked the website since then; this was primarily due to not working during the summer break and having just started back a few weeks prior to the focus group interview.

During the introduction of LEAP some had discussed the CE pathway and the possibility of continuing to earn their 15 hours of professional development credit; however, it was not clear to them what kinds of training would be available and how this might be different than the required professional development hours. One participant commented (and all others in the group agreed), “I don’t really know yet, because I’ve chosen the professional development pathway, it sort of continues me on the same path I was on. I don’t feel

like as of yet it's really changed anything for me." In addition, some wondered whether it would be worth it to have a program like LEAP that was tracking those hours if it wasn't any different than what they were currently doing.

The commitment required

Participants were not clear about the options available to them in each pathway or how HIPPY was going to support their pursuit of goals. For example, they wondered whether just pursuing additional CE training would be acceptable and whether it would dovetail with the 15 hours of Professional Development training required each year.

Some home visitors felt that they were being pressured into pursuing a CDA and were not given adequate information about other options. This had made them reluctant to make a commitment. Several participants commented that they were not sure what they signed up to do.

A few participants said the LEAP process had made them think more about what they wanted to do, but did not expect they'd be able to work on their goals in the immediate future. For example, one participant who had already earned college credit was considering completing her degree but felt that it was a more long-term goal due to her involvement with preparing one child for college and another for finishing high school.

Relevance of LEAP

Some home visitors did not think the LEAP process would be relevant to them since it seemed to emphasize education and

certification related to child development/child care, while they are mostly interested in the work they do with parents. One home visitor commented, "The thing I really like about my job with HIPPY is that I'm working with parents. I have never worked in daycare, never worked in a preschool, so I'm not exactly sure that my future would be working with children. I enjoy working with adults. I haven't made a decision one way or the other, but I'm not exactly sure that the CDA route would be for me."

In contrast, all participants felt that they learned a great deal from HIPPY training because it focuses on both parents and children, and helps them with their current job.

Many participants felt that being required to go through the LEAP process would take time away from the families they serve, which is their primary focus and commitment. In contrast, others felt that the resulting increase in their knowledge would help them serve families better.

How benefits compare with costs

Since they had participated in the pilot program prior to the full development of materials and website resources participants were not aware of resources available or additional information they could get to continue the goal setting process.

Based on what they knew, many did not see how they could complete a CDA or college degree. Many are part-time staff, have fairly large caseloads, and have limited additional time or money. One participant pointed out that even costs for attending

trainings, such as registration and transportation (e.g., cost of gas) would be a challenge. Some suggested that if HIPPY requires it, HIPPY should help pay for it. One participant stated that she would look for another job if it were required but not supported with funding.

Some who were interested in the CDA pathway did not see enough benefit in pursuing it if it would not result in raising their salary. The fact that they would need to continue to renew the CDA every few years was also a deterrent. Others expressed satisfaction with their current position and did not see the need for a degree or certification, as one participant put it, "I like working for HIPPY because it is helping others. I like where I am now, and the training we get is helpful, it relates well to our jobs."

On the other hand, participants with experience in the CDA process commented on how beneficial it can be, "When I earned my CDA the classes validated everything I learned through HIPPY. And I found out super cool things to share with families." It was also mentioned that a former home visitor who completed her CDA was able to get a full time job at a childcare center. One participant suggested that those going through the CDA process can "get their feet wet" and then share that with other home visitors and with the families they serve.

As a result of the focus group discussion, one group came up with the idea of pursuing a CDA as a group. This way they could encourage each other as they encounter challenges and share what they are learning.

Recommendations

1. **Explain the LEAP pathways diagram.**
Explaining and talking about the pathways diagram would help to reduce some misconceptions and anxiety.
 - Periodically check to make sure that Coordinators and Home Visitors understand the connections between pathways (i.e., how credits in one could build toward the other).
 - Include the pathways diagram on the LEAP website and blog, with a brief explanation.
2. **Allow flexibility in the timeline.**
 - Introduce LEAP in a step-wise manner so there is time to process and incorporate new information into lifestyles and priorities.
 - Allow for delayed entry of new employees until after they complete initial training and gain experience with the HIPPY model.
 - Allow for a longer timeline or smaller action steps for those who have time-limited commitments (family or other).
3. **Provide additional resources and periodic updates about what is available.**
 - Send updates or post information on the blog about new developments in the LEAP program (e.g., new materials on the website, links to training, tangible benefits such as the reimbursement process for training).

- Create a flyer with a description of LEAP and the many intangible benefits of the program, along with information about where to find program resources.
 - Provide free trainings online that can be accessed through the HIPPY website.
 - Obtain additional funding to continue to develop the LEAP program and resources.
4. Communicate directly with pilot sites to answer questions and discuss progress.
- Invite home visitors and coordinators to a group conference call hosted by HIPPY USA.
 - Find out the best times to communicate, such as February and the end of the school year.
5. Clarify HIPPY USA intentions and expectations. For example, provide information that would respond to the following questions:
- Will completing the goal setting process be required?
 - How long will home visitors have to decide on a pathway?
 - When will they begin-- could it wait until their second year with HIPPY?
 - Could they set goals that are for further in the future?
 - Will training obtained through a pathway count as PD hours?
 - What kind of help will there be to defray costs such as transportation, access to the internet, registration fees, etc.?
- What if their interests are not in child development/child care?
 - Could programs concentrate on LEAP mostly in the summer, when home visitors are not working with families?
 - Share strategies sites are using, such as a “group effort” in pursuing the CDA.
6. Provide motivation and incentives such as ways to share what is being learned, or a small career ladder within HIPPY. Build on the satisfaction and commitment home visitors feel for their work with families and the training received through HIPPY.
- Include within PD training the benefits of goal setting and opportunities available through further education.
 - Incorporate opportunities for home visitors to share with each other what they are learning in their courses/training and the goal setting process.
 - Transform the informal pathway from Parent to Home Visitor to Assistant Coordinator to Coordinator into a formal career ladder.
 - Modify the original “theory of change” for HIPPY to include the possibility of earning higher salaries and/or moving into positions of greater responsibility within HIPPY.