Parents As Teachers (PAT) is an early childhood family support and parent education home visiting program. Families may enroll in PAT beginning with pregnancy and may remain in the program until the child enters kindergarten. The PAT model includes one-on-one home visits, monthly group meetings, developmental screenings, and a resource network.

In 2012, PAT was designated as an evidenced-based program by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services HomVEE (Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness). An article on HomVEE was included in VCPN Volume 97.

*Home visits are conducted using structured visit plans and guided planning tools. There are at least 12 hour-long home visits annually with more offered to higher-need families. PAT uses a research-based and evidence-informed curriculum which is accessed online for PAT-certified educators.

* Monthly or more frequent group connection activities include family networking activities, educational presentations, community events, and ongoing groups.

* Annual health, hearing, vision, and developmental screenings, beginning within 90 days of enrollment are an important component of the model. These screening can detect developmental delays and health issues early.

* The program establishes ongoing relationships with institutions and community organizations that serve families. Parent educators help families identify needs, set goals, connect with appropriate resources, and overcome barriers to services.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (2013) identified 60 research studies on PAT that were completed between 1979 and 2012. Of these, there were four independent, randomized controlled trials and many quasi-experimental and qualitative studies, many of which have been published in peer-reviewed journals. Data have been collected from more than 16,000 children and parents (NREPP, 2010).

Copyright VCPN Vol. 99
PAT was established and piloted in Missouri in 1981. Currently, more than 2,000 PAT affiliates are serving more than 250,000 children in more than 200,000 families in all 50 states and in many foreign countries including New Zealand, Scotland, Wales, Switzerland, England, Australia, Canada, Germany, and Mexico.

The Parents as Teachers National Center contains a summary of research highlights. PAT has been shown to be effective in preventing child abuse and neglect. Participants had fewer child abuse investigations and reductions in parenting stress. PAT participants read more frequently to children and were more likely to enroll their children in preschool programs. PAT parents were more involved in children’s school activities and engaged children more in home learning activities. PAT children scored significantly higher on standardized testing. Child participants were more likely to be fully immunized and less likely to be treated for injury.

Adrienne Frank, MS OTR is the Director of Parents As Teachers (PAT) of Greater Williamsburg. She related that Child Development Resources was established in 1966 as a preschool for children with special needs. The agency began early intervention services in advance of Part C and they now coordinate an array of programs. The Part C Early Intervention serves more than 100 children at a time. The Early Head Start Program offers both classroom and home visiting services and serves 136 children. Parents As Teachers serves an additional 100 families or more a year. A Fatherhood grant through the Virginia Department of Social Services serves all three programs. The agency also has a grant to provide training and an interpretation program for those who speak English as a second language.

“A central point of entry intake person collects the initial information from the family and matches them to the most appropriate service,” explains Frank. “While the services may overlap to a degree, each program has a focus. For example, PAT is able to serve families until the children are six and the criteria for entry are more flexible than the other programs.”
Frank explains that PAT was initially a CHIP program (see VCPN, Volume 94 for a spotlight on CHIP, a health department program). When their CHIP program lost funding, the agency decided to offer an independent PAT program. Frank noted that most CHIP programs in Virginia use the PAT curriculum as the basis for their intervention. The Williamsburg program kept the nursing component. The nurse visits each family at least twice a year and is available for consultation. The Williamsburg program also offers mental health consultation in the form of reflective supervision for workers. A mental health consultant can visit the family with the parent educators, offer support, locate resources, and make referrals.

Each certified home visitor works with up to 20 families and visits a minimum of twice a month. “The research-based, online curriculum is for prenatal women and children birth through age three. The curriculum is very intensive and comprehensive,” adds Frank. “With additional training, parent educators can use a curriculum for children ages three to Kindergarten. This curriculum will be revised and available online in the future.”

PAT programs that reach Affiliate status and serve high needs communities may be eligible for MIECHV funding (see separate article, VCPN volume 97). The Williamsburg PAT is trained and certified and their program has an Affiliate status. PAT of Williamsburg has a number of funding sources including: a MIECHV grant, funds from Colonial Behavioral Health/Community Services Board, local funding, foundation grants, donations, and grants from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

Glynda Lowery, MSW, is supervisor for both the Healthy Families program and the PAT program in Newport News. Although Healthy Families has been in operation since 1996, the PAT program is just a year old. “We needed to add a program with wider time frames and eligibility criteria,” said Lowery. “For Healthy Families, the parent must enroll prenatally or by two weeks after birth. There were many families not able to receive services. PAT allows us to serve families as long as the child is age five or younger at the time of enrollment.”
Since the Healthy Families program was already a part of the community, starting the PAT services was relatively simple, except for getting referral sources to realize that families with preschool children were welcome. After almost a year, the program is operating at capacity with two workers and 48 families. Lowery would like to see the PAT program grow. Healthy Families has 16 workers and serves xxx families a year. Right now, PAT is accepting referrals on a universal basis (“first come, first served”) and are not excluding anyone. Still, most parents are low-income and single, and many have additional risk factors.

Like Williamsburg, the Newport News PAT has a nurse. The program formed a partnership with the Health Department to offer supervision to the nurse. “Some of the nurse’s services are reimbursable by Medicaid, so we hope that portion of the program can become partially self-sustaining,” said Lowery. Like Williamsburg, the Newport News programs have a centralized intake. They collaborate with the Resource Mothers program in their area by referring teen mothers to them and network with regular parenting education programs for families that need a less intense level of service.

Lowery stressed the need for collaborative work. “Collaborations avoid needless costs and duplication of services. We want to maximize the impact of each dollar spent in our programs,” she explained. Collaborations include community programs such as libraries and hospital systems. A staff worker is at each area hospital (Mary Immaculate and Riverside) each morning to meet new mothers. Even the Board of Directors is a collaborative effort with the PAT Board and the Healthy Families Board being the same. “We already had a wonderful resource team on our Healthy Families board,” said Lowery. “We have representatives from the hospitals, schools, counseling groups, health department, and other key agencies. The Healthy Families board agreed to serve as the Board for PAT as well.”

For more information about PAT, contact:
Lisa Spector –Dunaway, President & CEO/PAT State Leader, E-mail: lspecter@chipofvirginia.org

Adrienne Frank, MS OTR, (757) 566-3300 or e-mail: adriennef@cdr.org

Glynda Lowery, MSW, (757) 926-6492, e-mail: glowery@nngov.com

Website: www.chipofvirginia.org