Invest in Success

Bridging the Gap in Denver’s Part C Early Intervention

“By enhancing early childhood development opportunities for Denver’s children, we can ensure that every child in Denver is ready for kindergarten and prepped for a life time of learning.”
— Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper

Ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse families of children with developmental delays in Denver face challenges accessing Part C early intervention support and services (Denver Early Childhood Connections, 2005). Infants and toddlers, birth to three, who have a disability and/or developmental delay and their families are entitled to, individualized, quality early intervention services in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C. (This national legislation is commonly referred to as Part C.)

Early intervention enhances a child’s development
Early development research shows that “windows for learning” begin at birth. The link between early brain activity and brain development provides the building blocks for life long learning and function, including entering school ready to learn. With early intervention beginning at birth, or soon after the diagnosis of a disability or developmental delay, a child has greater developmental gains and less chance of developing a long-term problem.


Early intervention and culturally/racially diverse families
Infants and toddlers with disabilities and or developmental delays face additional challenges when they come from culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The lack of access to early childhood intervention information and resources substantially limits the ability of culturally, racially diverse parents of children with disabilities to exercise their rights and responsibilities under the law and to obtain necessary services for their children.

Gaps in receiving services
A number of gaps were found in the receipt of Part C early intervention services in Denver. In addition to some gaps between eligibility and identification, other gaps were found among families with specific demographic characteristics, and among children with cognitive and language delays, and those with behavior disorders. Despite the fact that most children receive well-baby examinations, many parents are unaware of their child’s cognitive delays. Cognitive delays are highest among children whose parents have the highest number of demographic risk factors.

Gaps between eligibility and actual receipt of Part C services:

- Time lags in getting families into Part C services
- Parents are unclear about Part C services
- Parents declining to enroll their children into Part C services because they did not feel that additional services were needed

Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project, Research to practice: Children with disabilities in Early Head Start, 2005
Meeting the needs of ethnic and racial groups

Early intervention service providers increasingly recognize the importance of dedicating staff, training, outreach, and translation and interpreting services to meeting the needs of ethnically and racially diverse populations. Other strategies may include establishing guidelines for staff if they identify a concern about a child including referrals to Part C, helping parents interpret the required regulations and access the services, providing emotional and logistical support for Part C evaluation and individualizing family service planning process, and working directly with Part C professionals to help them establish rapport with the families.

Latino and Asian children are underserved in Denver

In March 2005 Denver Early Childhood Connections reported 609 children ages birth to three receiving Part C services.

Children are more likely to receive Part C services in Early Head Start

Higher rates of identification are attributed to coordination between Early Head Start and Part C partners.

- Early Head Start and Part C partners jointly examine barriers to enrolling families at greatest risk, such as Latino, teen, African American, and less-educated parents into the Part C system.

- Partners examine whether there are time delays that can be reduced, build on strengths of families, and evaluate together how the needs of children with early delays are addressed.

Early Head Start programs and community partners can help families at greatest risk by helping them understand child development and the importance of early intervention in the prevention of later difficulties.

Sources used in this summary, in addition to those quoted include: National Council on Disability (2003)

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