Front Porch Project = Lasting Strategies to Protect Kids

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) believes that each member of a community can – and should – become more active in protecting children and preventing abuse. Often, after the death of a child due to abuse or neglect, neighbors and community members ask, “Is there anything I could have done to help?” and look for ways that they might have protected the child before the tragedy occurred. That’s why we began offering a research-supported, community-based training, the Front Porch Project (FPP), over three years ago.

FPP training sessions include information on developing comfort with diverse parenting styles, concerns about intervening, issues today’s families face, resiliency in children, and personal approaches to taking action. We review real-life scenarios and talk about “What would you do?” The training involves small group discussions, trainer presentations, video clips, and interactive exercises designed to build connections between community members and practice strategies for helping children.

So far, we’ve held 44 training sessions across the state and trained over 800 people. FPP has reached an additional 1,000-plus people who attend “mini sessions” at conferences and seminars. The bottom-line goal is to equip ordinary citizens with the skills they need to safely step in and help a child or support a parent in their neighborhood or a public place.

Post-training evaluations show that that 95% of participants in the FPP community training feel more comfortable intervening after they complete the six-hour session.

The percentage of participants who say they actually will step in to help increases, on average, from 32% to 87%; participants who say they would never intervene drops from 27% to zero following the training. Virtually all participants (99%) said that the training was useful and they would recommend it to someone else.

An important part of FPP is checking back to see how participants have used the FPP strategies to help kids in their communities. 85% of survey respondents used their FPP experience to step in to help at least one child with almost 35% helping a child more than five times. In addition, almost all had shared the information with at least one other adult.

Here’s just one example of feedback we received after a recent training in Perry County. “It was so refreshing to attend a workshop that had useful, practical information, and answered questions on difficult and sensitive issues. It was very thorough and the written material provided very helpful information as well as references,” said LeeAnn Blatt, RN,CSN, a school nurse in the Central Dauphin School District. “I plan on presenting information about the Front Porch Project to the school nurses in my district and I will also be suggesting you as a speaker/presenter (at a regional meeting).”

Here are some ways that FPP participants report making a difference:

- Becoming more aware of situations that might escalate for children and stepping in earlier than previously.
- Talking with a stressed-out parent about how hard it is to shop with children; distracting the children briefly so the parent could have a moment to finish her shopping.
- Understanding the importance of calling ChildLine when abuse is suspected.
- Getting the child’s attention on something close by and empathizing with a parent, which brought a smile to the parent’s face and seemed to calm the situation down.
- Discussing FPP ideas with religious organization and sponsoring additional training at a church.
- Being more sensitive to how hard it is to be a parent these days.
- Sharing what was learned with my neighbors and family members.