

Front Porch Project®

Learn how to protect PA's kids from abuse.

The Front Porch Project in Pennsylvania: 2011-2015

Background:

The future prosperity of any community depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. When a community invests wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. Yet, when not all children have equal opportunity for healthy growth and development – due to experiences of child abuse and neglect – we put our future at risk.

Child welfare professionals are working at full capacity to protect children, but it's clear that the problem is too great and too important to be delegated entirely to these valiant workers. Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (PFSA) believes that each member of a community can – and should – become more aware of and involved in helping protect children and support families to prevent abuse and neglect *before* it occurs. 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 safely have intervened to protect the child before the tragedy occurred.



That is why in 2011 PFSA became the Pennsylvania sponsor for an innovative initiative called the Front Porch Project (FPP). The project was developed nationally by American Humane Association in 1997 and became associated with the Butler Institute for Families (University of Denver) in 2012. FPP is a research-supported, community-based initiative built upon the belief that all people who are concerned about the safety and well-being of children in their communities need to be encouraged and

taught to make a difference. This concept – and the name of the program - is much the same as a good neighbor sitting on the “front porch” in years past, who would have been aware of and helpful in solving problems affecting families they knew. American front porches were more than convenient sitting places; they served as networking centers where concerned friends could share information and create support systems to help each other through difficult times.

Problems faced by families today obviously stem from far more complex issues than the architectural decline of front porches, yet there is great benefit in recapturing that sense of responsibility for the welfare of children that many of us have relinquished. The Front Porch Project advocates for becoming involved in each other's lives, recognizing the power of one person in making a significant difference in the life of a child, and applying strategies for intervening when necessary to help protect children and assist families.

The strength of the Front Porch Project is its unique focus on educating and empowering *concerned citizens* on the role they can have in protecting children and supporting families. PFSA partners with local organizations to implement and sustain the Front Porch Project in their communities. PFSA provides experienced trainers, materials and technical assistance to our local partners, who provide space, refreshments, and logistical support, as well as recruit community members to participate in FPP training. This partnership allows us to provide a cost-effective, grass-roots program to communities across Pennsylvania.

Learning Objectives:

PFSA began the project by offering a two-day training curriculum; at present we offer two formats (one-day/6-hour, which can be broken down into two sessions, and refresher/3-hour sessions for past participants) that can be customized for each community or group requesting training.

The primary learning objective is that participants will be able to identify situations in which they can comfortably and safely intervene to help a child or support a parent and to demonstrate possible responses and strategies for helping in these situations. Other learning objectives are:

- Understand definitions, dynamics and indicators of child abuse and neglect, as well as how the public child welfare system responds to reports of suspected child abuse.
- Identify and develop comfort with diverse parenting approaches.
- Increase comfort level and confidence to step in and help children.
- Describe complex issues facing families today and how these issues impact parenting.
- Understand how culture, gender and socioeconomic status can impact the effectiveness of intervention.
- Demonstrate an understanding of resiliency in children and the importance of individual adults connecting with children in positive ways.

Program Delivery:

Since its inception in Pennsylvania in June 2011, fifty FPP training sessions have been held across the state and 1,109 people have been trained. The demographics have remained consistent over the years of the program:



- 73% white; 20% African-American; 6% Latino; 1% all others
- 88% female; 12% male
- 40% live in urban areas; 32% live in suburban areas; 28% live in rural areas of Pennsylvania
- The audience for trainings was comprised of community members, parents, volunteers with community groups, or religious organizations (51%); professionals in the human services, mental health or education fields (39%) and all others or those not providing that information. (10%).

FPP training sessions include information on the scope of the problem of child abuse, personal safety, developing comfort with diverse parenting styles, reasons people do not intervene, complex issues affecting families, resiliency in children, and personal approaches to taking action. We also review several real-life scenarios and discuss “What would you do?” with the participants; this is consistently the most valuable and effective portion of the training, followed by the segments on how bystanders decide whether to take action, increasing comfort with parenting styles, and building resiliency in children. 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.

As part of our ongoing program assessment, we look at the competency our trainers:

Participants who agree or strongly agree:	%
Trainers knew subject area	99
Trainers were well prepared and organized	98
Trainers related well to group, answered questions	100
Trainers provided information and relevant examples	99
Trainers used handouts and AV to illustrate key points	99
Trainers motivated me to learn more about this subject	96
Trainers presented material at the correct level for understanding	99

Because one of the goals of the FPP is to support community members in their efforts to intervene, PFSA offers one-day refresher sessions, as well as short online meetings, to provide updated information and ongoing support to past participants.

Train-the-Trainer Program



In order to leverage community resources and support for FPP, PFSA initiated a Train-the-Trainer program, designed to equip local organizations, volunteers and faith-based groups to offer FPP sessions in their community. Because of staff limitations, PFSA is not able to meet the demand for FPP training, so the addition of local trainers made it possible for more Pennsylvanians to receive the FPP information.

The first group of new trainers was prepared to train in December, 2014. We added 11 new trainers from seven counties, bringing the number of trainers to 18 as of December 31, 2014. By June 20, 2015 there had been two training sessions given by the new trainers and more than 50 people became involved in FPP; they would not have

received the information without our local trainers. A second Train-the-Trainer session is scheduled for late 2015.

Key Outcomes:

Participants complete an evaluation form at the end of each training session. They are asked about the effectiveness of each component of the training day, the skills of the trainers, and changes in their knowledge and willingness to intervene when concerned about a child in their neighborhood or in a public place.

Cumulative results of the evaluations show that 97% of participants in the Front Porch Project community training agreed that they feel more comfortable intervening with struggling parents or families. The percentage of participants who say they *actually will step in to help often or very often* increases, on average, from 32% to 88% following training. The percentage of participants who say they would “never or almost never” step in before training averages 30%; after training only 1% say they will not get involved.

Virtually all participants (99%) said that the training was useful and they would recommend it to someone else. Other key outcomes are outlined below:

Participants who agree or strongly agree:	%
I understand child abuse and neglect better now.	90
I better understand my fears and concerns about intervening.	95
I better understand my attitudes toward children and families.	90
I learned more strategies to help and intervene.	94
I feel more comfortable intervening with a child/family now.	95
I can apply training ideas to everyday situations I encounter.	85
I am more likely to intervene now than before the training.	88
I am more mindful of families when I am in public.	82
I more strongly believe I should play a role in child abuse prevention.	81
I have more understanding about my responsibility to support families and help children.	83

Although changed attitudes and increased awareness are important, the true value of the Front Porch Project is its focus on providing strategies for helping that can be implemented immediately after the training. Ultimately, the measure of success of the training lies in whether participants actually intervene when they see situations of concern regarding a child or family. We ask participants how often they would intervene before and after the training:

Participants who report that:	%
Before training, I would intervene OFTEN or VERY OFTEN	32
After training, I would intervene OFTEN or VERY OFTEN	87
Before training, I would intervene SOMETIMES or VERY LITTLE	38
After training, I would intervene SOMETIMES or VERY LITTLE	12
Before training, I would NEVER intervene	30
After training, I would NEVER intervene	1



The Front Porch Project is designed to have a “ripple effect” in communities. Participants are surveyed again at six months and one year after training to see whether the outcomes achieved at the end of the training day continue over time. Participants who attended FPP sessions since its inception were surveyed via email in July 2014 and asked whether they have used the training in a real-life situation, whether they have shared the information they learned with another adult in their community and whether they continued to seek out opportunities to learn more about the problem of

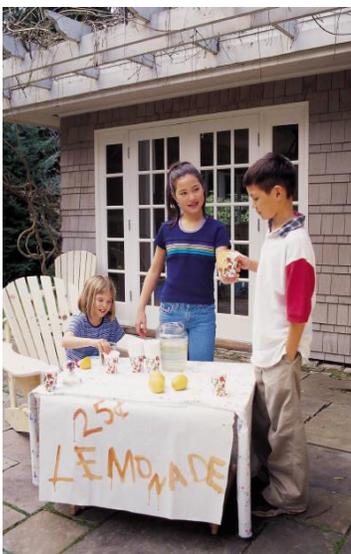
child abuse since they completed FPP training. Although the response rate was low (10%; we were unable to maintain current email addresses for some participants, and others did not respond to the survey request), those who did complete the online survey reported continuing value of the training.

Post-training participants who say:	Percentage at six months:	Percentage at one year:
I have used what I learned to intervene on behalf of a child or in support of a parent.	60	71
I have shared what I learned with at least one other adult.	98	85
I have continued to learn more about child abuse and how to protect children.	57	52

Past participants also reported that they have helped an average of five children in the previous six months, and have spoken to at least five adults about what they learned. About 10% of the training sessions held in 2014-2015 were initiated by someone who had attended, or heard about FPP from someone who attended.

Conclusion:

The Front Porch Project in Pennsylvania has met its projections for number of training sessions and participants trained in each year, as well as its goal to adapt the original curriculum to meet the needs of as many community groups as possible. The key learning objectives for the training have been met in each session. The training is thought to be useful to participants, and participants report actually using the strategies they learned and that learning appears to continue over time. In short, the project has been extremely successful.



One of the resources used in the training is James Vollbracht’s book *Stopping at Every Lemonade Stand: How to Create a Culture That Cares for Kids* (2001). Vollbracht outlines concrete, often simple, ways communities can work together to create the kind of culture that cares about children and families and echoes the days of neighbors watching out for each other from their front porches. Vollbracht writes:

“As we go about consciously and intentionally re-creating our culture, we might want to adopt the eloquent question of the Masai: ‘And how are the children?’...Whenever members of different tribes meet, that question is asked. The greeting acknowledges the importance the Masai place on their children’s well-being. If the answer is ‘The children are well,’ it means that all is truly well in the tribe. The children are considered the barometer for the health and well-being of all.”