



Institute for Community Health

A collaboration of the Cambridge Health Alliance, Mount Auburn Hospital, and Partners Healthcare

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"Let's Talk": Linking public health approaches to an early literacy program evaluation.

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The impact of literacy on public health is significant, and is now considered a stronger indicator of overall health status than other socio-economic variables, including educational level, race and age. "Let's Talk. . . It Makes a Difference!" is a program developed by the Agenda For Children (AFC) that is focused on increasing parental awareness about the importance of oral language development in young children. The campaign's mission is to improve children's vocabularies so they will be better prepared to read and learn once they enter elementary school. Targeting low-income parents of young children ages 1-5, "Let's Talk" has distributed literature, promotional materials and books throughout the city, while reinforcing the message that parents are their children's most important teacher. Through reading parties, storytelling events and parent-child activities, staff model behaviors for parents/primary caregivers that show them how to create a home environment that encourages and supports language development in their children. Working in collaboration with the AFC, the Institute for Community Health has designed an evaluation that combines public health methodologies and theories of behavior change with approaches to early language development. Evaluation methods, which include surveys, interviews, and focus groups, are used to assess the impact on parents' behavior, knowledge, and awareness of activities they can do to foster their children's literacy skills. The challenges and opportunities of designing and conducting a multi-disciplinary evaluation will be discussed, along with the evolution of the evaluation process. Preliminary data from the study will be presented.