

Baby College helping new parents

By Sarah Rankin
UNC Staff Writer

The proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child," is taken very seriously in Durham. A new program, the East Durham Children's Initiative, will collaborate with community partners to create "a pipeline of services from cradle to career." The initiative is modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone, a community-based organization in Harlem created to break the cycle of generational poverty in New York City.

One program, Baby College, is already underway. The Baby College program – only one component of the East Durham Children's Initiative – is a series of weekly classes for new parents that encourages positive interactions with children and teaches new parenting skills.

Patricia Harris is the program coordinator of Welcome Baby, one of the community sponsors of Baby College.

"It's an effort by members of the community to try to duplicate the idea of concentration services for children and families for a bigger impact," Harris said.

How it all started

Several community groups contributed to Baby College's creation.

In 2007, Durham's Partnership for Children was selected to pilot the Incredible Years Program, a high-impact family support program. The Incredible Years Program is an internationally-recognized, researched-based

curriculum that helps build relationships between children, parents and teachers.

To launch the program, Durham's Partnership for Children contracted with Welcome Baby and Healthy Families Durham. Both are nonprofits with a history of serving Durham families.

In this stage of development, Welcome Baby and the Center for Child & Family Health leveraged the original grant money and found other grants. They have secured grants from GlaxoSmithKline and the NC Department of Health and Human Services, and the two groups are working together to grow the program.

What the program offers

Ellen Reckhow, a co-chairwoman of the East Durham Children's Initiative and a Durham County commissioner, said the Baby College program is a fundamental part of the initiative.

"We feel that starting early and teaching parents about being their child's first teacher is critical," she said.

Two different Baby College courses are held at First United Antioch Baptist Church, which was selected because of its location at 1415 Holloway St. The first section of courses serves parents of infants up to age 1. The second serves parents of children 3 to 5 years old.

The Baby College for infants courses focus on the health and safety issues of raising infants and coping with parent stress. These courses also teach how to enhance the bond



PHOTOS BY THEO J. RODDY, WELCOME BABY STAFF

Baby College offers free childcare during sessions to make sure all parents who are interested are able to attend. Childcare provider Gladis Gutarra is pictured here with several of the participants' children.

between parent and child, including activities like singing and holding the child.

In the 3 to 5-year-old class, the children are more interactive, so subjects include playtime for parents and children, minimizing tantrums and positive discipline methods.

Harris said the 3 to 5-year-old class is a rigorous course. The program runs for 14 weeks, two hours each week, and parents are expected to attend 11 of the 14 sessions.

"Parents get to really master the information," she said. "They also get toys and other craft materials that they can use in their homework with their child. So there are some nice take-home benefits for parents beside the information that they gain."

All Baby College teachers are certified in the Incredible Years Program curriculum and have experience with early childhood education. Some teachers have worked with Head Start programs, and others have owned private day care centers.

Looking forward

Harris said that next year, Baby College for toddlers will be added to the programs.

Reckhow said she envisions the Baby College program growing along with the East Durham Children's Initiative, transforming into a full range of classes from birth or pregnancy through high school.

"That's the long-range vision," Reckhow said. "A continuum."



Benito Guerrero holds his son, Eliut Guerrero, at the Baby College program for infants.

Enrollment Info:

- Currently there are open spots available in Welcome Baby's infant program
- Classes for children in the 3-5 age group are currently full
- New sessions for children ages 3-5 will begin in August of this year
- Interested Parents should contact the Welcome Baby offices at (919) 560-7150 for more information about classes or to enroll in the program