

Share Your Story...

Illinois Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Development Home Visiting Program

Home visiting has a demonstrated track record of improving infant and maternal health outcomes. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is providing a critical way to engage children and families who are especially vulnerable during this time. Home visitors are on the front lines in supporting families by going above and beyond to quickly adapt and find creative ways to meet the basic needs of children and families.

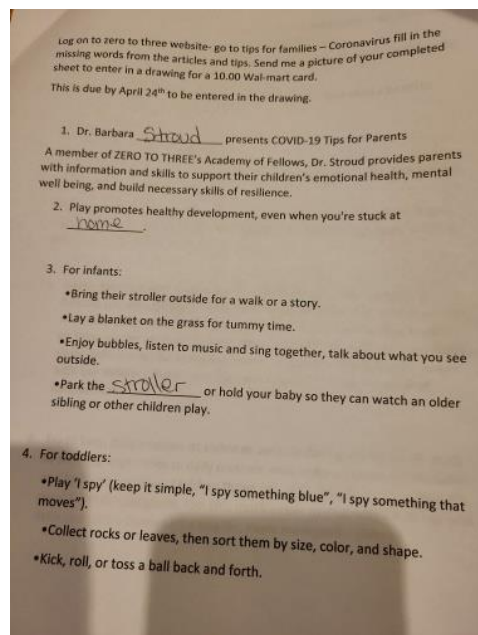
Through its “Share Your Story” initiative, the Illinois Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program in the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development has provided an opportunity for home visitors to share on-the-ground stories of their experiences, including the bright spots as well as challenges. The focus of these stories is to bring attention to the amazing work they do, to share what has been working in serving families, and to illustrate how home visitors can be supported to continue carrying out their work.

Stephenson County Health Department

Early on during the COVID-19 pandemic, Stephenson County Health Department (SCHD) family support specialist, Ashlee Reuter, noted some clients did not have access to resources for doing Zoom calls or other virtual video visits that were secure. At that point, programs were not allowed to use FaceTime or Facebook Messenger due to HIPPA concerns that limited the number of video visits that program staff were able to conduct. This was challenging as those were the only options for some clients. Ashlee continued to work diligently in connecting with the families in her caseload and offering support.

Ashlee shared that currently she is working with a new mom who is struggling with post-partum depression. “Because of the agency guidelines that have been put in place, I now have my work phone with me at all times,” said Ashlee. “I’ve been able to keep in close contact with her even being at home.... and have spent extra hours texting with her and talking her through some things,” she said. Ashlee also has been answering the mom’s questions about buying a vehicle for the first time. This client has shared how being able to talk to Ashlee has helped her get through some of her feelings and feel understood and heard by someone.

The SCHD staff have also been trying to stay close and connected with families in their program. As such, Ashlee has developed some great resources and games to help foster and maintain these connections. “I created a virtual home visit sheet for us to use to track our visits weekly,” Ashlee explained. “I’ve also created an I SPY game for clients to find different things, take pictures with their baby, and send to me to create a collage for them after completion.” Ashlee shared that while these things have been a “huge hit,” it just is not the same as being able to see them in-person every week.



Another challenge during this time is that the SCHED staff miss one another! A major shift has been for those team members who shared an office with someone but are no longer allowed to be in the office at the same time with each other. Staff have had to create weekly schedules where someone works from home while the other works in the office, and they switch off that way. Ashlee reported that although it has been a really big change, it still has had a positive impact. While at home, she can still focus on getting her calls done without distraction and is able to talk to her clients for longer periods of time.

Ashlee provided some excellent advice for other home visitors — "Give yourself some grace and do the best you can. This is a chaotic time for everyone, and we can't do it all. As much as we want to be able to help everyone and keep our same schedules, we just can't and that's ok!"

Julia Marynus, Director, SCHED Public Health Family Services, remarked, "It is really valuable to know what you (the SCHED home visiting team) are experiencing working from home and fitting everything together to make it work for yourself and your family, your clients and their families, and your work family."



Agency Mission

The mission of the Stephenson County Health Department is to ensure that parents are connected to all the services they need, as early as possible, so that their children will enter school ready to learn.

