



# Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) Evaluation

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## Steps to Success: Implementing a Home Visiting Program Designed to Prevent Rapid Repeat Pregnancies Among Adolescent Mothers

About one in six teen births are to young women who have already had a baby. Rapid repeat pregnancies can have adverse consequences for these young mothers and their children. A small but growing body of research suggests that programs for adolescent mothers, particularly those that promote long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), can reduce the risk of rapid repeat pregnancy. The study of Steps to Success—a home visiting program for adolescent mothers that offers counseling on contraception, adequate birth spacing, parenting, and child development—aims to build on this growing body of research.

The study, sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, used a random assignment research design to examine the effectiveness of Steps to Success. Adolescent mothers who agreed to take part in the study were randomly assigned to Steps to Success or to a control group that received a more traditional home visiting program that focused only on parenting and child development. Healthy Families San Angelo (HFSA)—an experienced, community-based organization in San Angelo, Texas—implemented and delivered both programs, with funding from a Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) grant the agency received from ACF.

### Steps to Success in San Angelo

HFSA developed Steps to Success to address a pressing service need in the community. Teen pregnancy and birth rates in San Angelo and throughout Texas are among the highest in the nation. In addition, area youth receive little contraceptive education in school and have access to few pregnancy prevention programs or services. HFSA designed Steps to Success to address rapid repeat pregnancy among adolescent mothers by supplementing the agency's more traditional home visiting model with counseling on contraception and adequate birth spacing, as well as education and career planning. For both Steps to Success and the agency's more traditional home visiting model,

### Evaluation of the Steps to Success Home Visiting Program—A Snapshot

- Healthy Families San Angelo (HFSA) recruited adolescent mothers for the study who were pregnant or had recently had a baby. HFSA recruited young mothers from hospitals, clinics, and high schools in and around San Angelo, Texas.
- Young mothers who agreed to participate were randomly assigned to either a program group that received Steps to Success or a control group that received a more traditional home visiting program. Both programs offered home visits for up to two years.
- Steps to Success home visits covered parenting skills, child development, education and career goals, contraception, and adequate birth spacing. The program aimed to actively engage fathers in visits.
- Home visits offered to the control group covered only parenting and child development topics and did not actively engage fathers.
- The study team is conducting surveys one and two years after families enter the study. Information from these surveys will be used to compare the two groups and examine whether the additional services that Steps to Success offers make a difference in contraceptive use, repeat pregnancy, and other outcomes.



trained professionals make regular visits to the mother's home for up to two years, with the frequency of visits dropping from weekly to monthly over this period. However, Steps to Success offers weekly visits with families for a longer period than the traditional program, which allows time for home visitors to provide counseling to families on additional topics. In addition, unlike HFSA's traditional program, Steps to Success places a high priority on actively engaging fathers in home visits as appropriate.

The adolescent mothers served by HFSA during the study period were primarily Hispanic (68 percent) and English speaking (91 percent). They ranged in age from 14 to 20 years old at study enrollment, with two-thirds age 18 or older. About three-quarters reported being in a romantic relationship with the baby's father when they entered the program. At enrollment, 43 percent were pregnant; the rest were recruited within a few months of the birth of their baby. Program staff reported that poverty and limited social support networks were common among participants.

## The Steps to Success Difference

As planned, Steps to Success provided substantially more support than the traditional home visiting program offered to the control group. Steps to Success families averaged 20 home visits during their first year in the program, compared with 12 home visits for families enrolled in the traditional program. In addition, Steps to Success's goal of actively engaging fathers led to more participation by fathers in home visits; fathers participated in 38 percent of Steps to Success home visits, compared with 7 percent of visits in the traditional program.

Home visitors in both programs covered parenting education and child development topics during almost every visit. However, in Steps to Success, half the visits also covered employment and career planning, and 40 percent covered contraception and adequate birth spacing (with a particular focus on LARCs), topics that were not covered in the traditional program. Steps to Success home visitors worked to integrate the message that participants should continue to plan for and pursue their education and career goals while parenting their babies, because this would help make them better parents. Steps to Success home visitors also worked with participating families to see the link between career planning and family planning and how another pregnancy in the near term might affect their education and career goals.

According to home visitors, HFSA leaders, evaluation site visitors, and the participants themselves, participants in both programs valued the child development and parenting information

they received and appreciated the support of their home visitor. During home visit observations, mothers (and fathers, in Steps to Success) actively engaged in the home visit activities. Parents who attended focus groups appreciated having someone to talk to and the information they received.

Both HFSA home visiting programs aimed to serve families for two years. However, given the many competing demands and ever-changing life circumstances these families face, keeping the families engaged over such a long period can be difficult. Both programs encountered challenges in this area. However, Steps to Success home visitors retained a larger proportion of families than home visitors in the traditional program did, 65 percent compared with 42 percent during families' first year in the program. Steps to Success home visitors have more time to get and keep families engaged, and the program offers a broader range of services, which might account for its greater success in retaining families.

## Looking Ahead

This study of the implementation of Steps to Success was conducted in conjunction with a rigorous impact study based on a random assignment research design. Upcoming impact reports, scheduled for release beginning in 2018, will examine the effects of Steps to Success—relative to the traditional home visiting program offered to the control group—on participating mothers' contraceptive use, subsequent pregnancies, and other outcomes one and two years after they enrolled in the program.

### The PREP Multi-Component Evaluation

The PREP evaluation, led by Mathematica Policy Research, has three main components: (1) documenting the implementation of funded programs in participating states, (2) analyzing performance management data provided by PREP grantees, and (3) assessing the impacts of PREP-funded programs in four sites using a random assignment design. This brief, and the accompanying full report, "Preventing Rapid Repeat Births Among Adolescent Mothers: Implementing Steps to Success in San Angelo, Texas," are part of a series of products from the evaluation. Learn more about the evaluation at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/personal-responsibility-education-program-prep-multi-component>. Learn more about the PREP initiative at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/programs/adolescent-pregnancy-prevention>.

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