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Alberta Home Visitation Network Association



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Network Association

### In this Issue:

**Be the navigator, not the driver**

**A road map for the journey**

**Why parents put the brakes  
on goal-setting**

**Alberta's home visitors share travel tales**

**A boost from AHVNA**

**Meet our board!**

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## The long and winding road

*Home visitors are there when families chart a course in life*

We all have heard the story of Alice who asks the Cheshire cat which way she ought to go. The cat replies that it depends on which way you want to go.

This is true for all of us. We need to determine our goals. Then we need to work out the best path to achieve the goals and outcomes we desire. In home visitation we work with families who have goals and may require some assistance along the way, be it signs, directions or meeting helpful people. A home visitor is like a passenger or a guide in the car as the family steers a course in parenthood. Of course, the home visitor is there when the family wants to change direction. (Check for an article on change on the AHVNA website.)

This issue of **Connections** discusses goal setting and home visitation. Take a look! There was an overwhelming response of articles and tools for this issue that will be useful for programs when working with families. We weren't able to print them all in this issue but would like to suggest that you check out our website [www.ahvna.org](http://www.ahvna.org) in the "Resources" section. Look for plenty of helpful tools such as the following suggestions by staff at Healthy Families Healthy Futures in Westlock:

- Family Support Plans— article and documentation template
- Service Planning
- The Difference Game—article and a tool for establishing parent and family goals.
- Stages of Change –tip sheet
- Service Planning and Goal Setting—this tool kit, "Setting Goals With Families" explores how home visitors can facilitate goal setting discussions using a step-by-step process that includes forms for documentation.
- Postnatal Nutrition Screen—tools for tracking mother's nutrition needs and goals.

Programs also set goals for their organizations. In this issue, Marianne Dickson shares her experience about being a member of AHVNA and how goal attainment is accomplished. One of our goals in distributing this publication is to increase awareness of home visitation in the province. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the AHVNA office.

**Lavonne Roloff, Provincial Director**

- Developing the Home Visitation Service Plan – article
- Parent Goals and Reporting Outcomes—article

# Be the navigator, not the driver

*Home visitors track progress and point out options along the way.*

By Tracy Bridges

Imagine wanting to take a one week vacation to ...

The answer is likely different for everyone. Your choice is limited by your knowledge and by your resources of time, money and imagination. If you are like most of us, you will tap into external resources to provide some options and help you make your decision.

Setting goals with families is very similar and every bit as challenging. While we must allow the family to remain in the driver's seat, we know that they often resort to taking the road that is most familiar and comfortable to them. It can become overwhelmingly difficult to try a new direction or destination without a clear road map to follow.

As home visitors, our role is like that of the travel agent or navigator, who gives the family road maps and support during the planning process. There are three critical steps to helping families achieve their goals: **identifying, planning and progressing.**

Families that have had little or no previous support, guidance or success with goals will need encouragement and direction in this process. Families will be ready to set goals at different times and in different ways. Statements like, "I wish I had...", "I wonder if...", "If only I...", "This needs to change..." are all signals that a family may be ready to set goals. This is the **identification** stage of goal setting. Discussion and clarification are critical to ensure that it is the family's goal that will be addressed and not the goals of the home visitor or program.

Goals should be **SMART**: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. Encourage the family to be specific about what they want and to make sure it is within their reach. Goals should not contradict each

other and should be reflective of a family's values and beliefs. The more concrete the goal, the easier it is to manage. Move the family from "I want a house", to "I want a two bedroom house with a garage, located on the north end of town close to a bus route." This clarifies exactly what the family needs and helps focus the next steps.

The next step is mapping out how the family will succeed in reaching their destination.

**Planning** should be broken down into small **measurable steps** that will allow the family to experience success early on in their process. Having a template or a guideline that families and home visitors can work from assists in clarity, common understanding and gives positive direction to moving goals forward. It is also helpful to attach some timelines to the specific steps so that families are not overwhelmed—"By the end of the week, I will pick up the application form for school." Writing goals down helps crystallize them and give them force. It also gives families a visual and a focal point when other things start intruding or shifting directions.

To be successful with family goal plans a consistent **progression** should take place. This promotes accountability for both the family and the home visitor, allowing them to feel they are moving forward. Case notes should also reflect ongoing progress or barriers the family is experiencing, thus grounding the goal in the family's reality. Progress reports are a valuable tool in demonstrating to the family how much they have accomplished and what remains to be achieved. They provide an overview of where the family has been and where they are going.

Once we've pointed out all the possible routes and given families opportunities to experience success, they can build the skills, knowledge and confidence to take the wheel themselves. We need only wish them a bon voyage.

*Tracy Bridges is a consultant with Region 6 Early Child Development Services, Edmonton.*



# Why parents put the brakes on goal setting

By Laurie Lafortune

Most of us would agree that setting goals is an important and necessary task, if families want to give their lives direction. We hope our families will become proactive rather than reactive, and that they develop personal strategies to help them cope with life's complex challenges and unexpected events. A plan with clear goals keeps the home visitor and the parent on track, and allows for progress to be monitored and evaluated. Strategies can be reviewed, goals and tasks can be revised and an on-going effort by the family can be sustained. So, considering all the above benefits, why are some parents resistant to the idea of goal setting?

It may be that articulating goals for a family adds another dimension to the already challenging task of setting individual goals. Goals for the family are more complex, involve more people, and often need to address long-standing issues around family functioning. Complex and long-term goals can often seem overwhelming. The many tasks, the long term planning and the deferred rewards associated with long-term goals, can create barriers to success. Other factors contributing to resistance are:

- the goal may not be perceived as realistic by the parent.
- the parent may have had little success in the past with accomplishing goals.
- the parent may think the goal is 'too hard', not achievable and not manageable.
- a parent may be receiving different messages from others, including family members, friends or other professionals.
- the goal may not be building on the strengths of the family.
- the family may be dealing with a crisis, or struggling to meet basic needs and so cannot look beyond the immediate situation.
- and most importantly, if the goal is identified by the home visitor and NOT the parent, then the parent is unlikely to achieve success.

and strategies related to the goals. Trina says, "I never actually use the word 'goal', and yet I find that parents do have a good idea of what they want to do and what they plan to accomplish."

Julia Schmidtke, a Healthy Families home visitor with Family Services of Central Alberta, serves the areas of Red Deer and Blackfalds.



"Language is powerful," states Trina Kennedy, outreach worker for the Infant/Preschool Wellness Program in Red Deer," and the term 'goal' itself can be scary to some people." It may trigger unpleasant memories of past experiences for some parents. Instead of using the word 'goal', Trina asks families, "What types of things would you be interested in working on?" If a parent has trouble verbalizing an answer, Trina uses active listening techniques to encourage conversation and clear understanding. On the other hand, if the parent states a long list of goals, Trina asks him or her to state two priorities. Working in partnership, the worker and parent can then identify tasks

She joins other workers in stressing the importance of a family identifying its own goals. "A family is unlikely to successfully achieve a goal, if the goal is not their own," she says. So how do families reach a place of envisioning a good future for themselves and moving forward with hope?

Julia believes that time is the key to successful goal setting with families. "With enough time, trust builds."

***Laurie Lafortune is the program coordinator of Healthy Families for Family Services of Central Alberta.***



## On the Home Front: A plan for success

When a family agrees to participate in a home visitation program, family members and program staff work together to develop a service plan. The plan:

- outlines the family's strengths, needs and resources, and its goals with respect to home visiting and parenting.
- identifies strategies that can help the family achieve its goals and set appropriate timelines.
- identifies other community-based services that can help the family meet its needs.
- home visitors make referrals and help families access community-based services, as required. This helps families strengthen their own support networks and become more self-reliant.
- establishes the schedule of home visits.
- outlines the roles and responsibilities of each party.
- the family and the home visitor review the service plan regularly. They monitor progress and revise the plan as required.

—from *Alberta Home Visitation Guidelines*, November 2004. *Service plans*, page 21.

## A road map for the journey

*A good service plan helps families and home visitors find their way*

By Connie LeMay

Service plans are the road maps that help families and home visitors plan, implement and evaluate home visitation services. Service planning is essential for delivery of effective and meaningful services to families. Clearly defined service plans increase the likelihood that families are able to provide their children with a good start in life.

Service plans guide the frequently asked questions of home visitation. They clearly identify the goals, strategies and time lines that guide the activities of families and home visitors. Creating a service plan is a shared process. The home visitor's role is to facilitate and coordinate service plan discussions and to document the process. The role of the family is to identify their strengths, needs, challenges and hopes for the future.

To begin, develop an understanding of who will be involved in the home visitation process. Formal and informal assessments provide home visitors with an understanding of families in terms of their strengths and challenges.

Second, explore each family's reason for engaging in home visitation. Understand their initial reason for engaging in services. This provides important information about what stage of change parents are at, and what will motivate and retain them in home visitation.

Third, it is important to explore each family's past experiences, preconceived notions and any association that families bring to home visitation. Any one of these has the potential to impact engagement and the outcomes of home visitation. Service planning and goal setting may be an easy, straightforward process or a difficult one.

Fourth, pay specific attention to each family's strengths and resources. Highlight or amplify their strengths and resources to create hope and optimism about their ability to change and grow. The belief in one's ability to change is strongly influenced by past successes and current resources.

The fifth step is to begin to clearly understand what change or difference a family is hoping to achieve. For some parents this maybe



difficult to articulate or identify. Understand each family's reasons and actions. Create a vision of future possibilities that helps parents to believe in their ability to work with a home visitor to develop strong children and families. The challenge for home visitors is to not just to provide support but also to motivate parents to develop a course of action toward change.

Developing a course of action is the goal setting process. The purpose of goal setting is to have parents identify the need for change, to increase each parent's belief in their ability to change and to develop concrete plans for change. The home visitor's expertise is in selecting or developing strategies and activities that increase the likelihood that the family will achieve its goals. Strategies may include information sharing, modeling, coaching and reflective conversations. Monitoring, record keeping and feedback is required to evaluate if families are progressing towards their desired goals. Monitoring of service plans informs the decision to move a family from one service level to another, using defined criteria.

The sixth step of service planning is to determine the timing and frequency of home visitation services. Home visitation programs are more effective when well-defined criteria are used to determine the intensity of home visitation services. Levels of services are reviewed as part of the service planning evaluation process.

*Connie LeMay is a consultant to AHVNA.*

## Going from point A to B: which routes are best?

The goals of home visitation, broadly stated, are that parents have positive parent-child relationships and that they demonstrate knowledge and skills related to child development and safety. Children meet development milestones and families are connected to community resources and services.

How do we get there? The Alberta home visitor's guide to yearly family plans supplies a framework of steps toward four goals:

- parents promote healthy child growth and development
- parents are knowledgeable and skillful in meeting changing needs of growing children
- parents develop positive a relationship with their child
- parents promote family wellness

The complete Family Support Plan, along with a template tool for tracking outcomes with families, can be found on AHVNA's website at: [www.ahvna.org](http://www.ahvna.org)

Keep in mind a few pointers about goal setting with families:

- Home visitation is an early intervention service. Parents are the focus for change; the changes affect the child.

- Creating a vision of future possibilities helps parents to understand and believe in their ability to work with a home visitor to develop strong children and families.
- A parent's confidence in his or her ability to change is a central factor that influences the development and achievement of goals. Highlighting or amplifying a family's strengths and resources creates hope and optimism about their ability to change and grow.
- For some families the word goals may not fit or it may bring up memories of past unsuccessful attempts to change. Home visitors are encouraged to match their language to that of parents and to explore any past experiences they have had with goal setting.
- Home visitation goals reflect specific change to knowledge, beliefs and/or behaviors. Breaking the evidence of a parent's success into smaller steps will help parents to understand that change is a process that requires time, sustained activity and feedback.

# Alberta's home visitors share travel tales about goal setting

## Families discover what they value

Our team uses the Values Activity set out in one of the Great Kids Manuals. Each value is printed on its own laminated card. The home visitor takes out two sets, one for each parent and has them individually identify their top 10. Common values and the benefits of differing values are discussed. The home visitor will develop a small color poster for the family to keep—"the Smith Family Values"—or something like that.

We find it's a great tool for finding strengths and goals.

Some of the values are:

- Having nice things for my home
- Paying bills on time
- Spending time with my kids
- Education
- Reading to my kids
- Spending time with friends
- Having a car
- My kids doing well in school
- Laughter in our home

—*Holly Crone, Program Supervisor, Healthy Families; Salvation Army Community Services, Calgary*

## Top 10 goals

The top-ten list of common goals would include:

Child development, community services/resources, going back to school or education, parenting skills, decreasing isolation, finding daycare/preschool, behavior management,

cultural community connection, connecting to ESL classes and career connection.

The Healthy Babies Healthy Children tool is very useful in working with families on goal setting. One family quoted (on the topic of goal setting) "it helps me focus and get organized with my thoughts and in my life."

—*Joanna Beston, home visitor with Spectrum Healthy Families, Calgary*

## The Difference Game

We use a tool called the "Difference Game" developed by Carl Dunst. This is used to help identify what are some areas of need and to also prioritize those identified needs. The game uses cards with phrases on it that then get sorted into a "yes" or a "no" pile. The phrases complete the statement. "It would make a difference in my life if I" ... (i.e. had a real friend, had stable housing, birth control that works, a good job). From the "yes" pile, the parent then prioritizes their top five needs. For the Difference Game we use two sets. One is for the parent (as in the previous example) and the other is regarding the child. The process is similar, only with a focus on "It would make a difference in my life if..." ("my child ate well, my child was potty trained, I had more time with my child, I knew what to feed my six-month-old").

We also do an "alpha" (antenatal psychological health assessment) survey with women to determine the need for support/resources/referrals regarding the prevention of domestic violence. This survey asks women to report on their own parents' relationship and whether or not they witnessed or experienced violence as a child. The next section asks questions regarding their current relationship. These

questions are derived from ALPHA Group, April 2005, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto.

Nipissings Child Development Milestone Screens are useful in monitoring child development and determining if there is a need to make referral to early childhood development worker, public health nurse, and/or pediatrician. These needs get translated into goals both short term and long term.

The initial Kempe Family Stress Assessment also is used to guide the goal development with families. For example, the Family Stress Checklist assessment identifies potential concerns regarding discipline and unrealistic expectations, mental health issues, substance abuse history or current issues or unresolved childhood issues.

We also complete a prenatal and postnatal screen to determine if nutrition is a potential area of need – i.e. referral to dietician/food bank/goal of menu planning. We address home safety by completing a home safety checklist, and then assisting with accessing necessary safety devices and/or installing these.

—*Teresa O'Riordan, Program Supervisor, Healthy Families Healthy Futures, Westlock.*

*Editor's note: please check out the AHVNA website and follow the Resources and Tools links to find copies of The Difference Game; the Alpha Self-Report Questionnaire For Women; and Prenatal Nutrition Screen and "My Typical Day" Diet Tracker for expectant mothers*

# A boost from AHVNA

## *Membership helps agencies meet their goals*

By Marianne Dickson

Our agency recently underwent our annual certification process and I am pleased to say we were re-certified as a Teaching-Family Association site. This required application for re-certification involves a self-study and remittance of outcomes and consumer satisfaction. Our triennial application involves an on-site review by two or three certified site evaluators who are assigned to review our agency to ensure quality assurance and adherence to ethical standards and goals of the Teaching-Family Association. The feedback we receive from this very intensive process bolsters our commitment to continuous improvement and supports us in setting goals and developing a plan to achieve them.

As part of our evaluation process, our presentation to the site evaluators included our local and provincial affiliations that contribute to the work we do with children and families. We discussed how these affiliations support our growth. I had the privilege of highlighting our membership with Alberta Home Visitation Network Association.

The evaluators were very interested in hearing about the uniqueness of the Association and how this filtered to benefit children and families. It was good to be in the position of educating others about AHVNA because it reminded me of why I choose to be a member. An agency that is interested in continuous improvement must be mindful of measuring itself against the goals and the mandates that drive its services. Participation with AHVNA is one of the means to achieve our agency's goals as we grow and respond to constant changes and learning opportunities. The following is a list of benefits that AHVNA has to offer us collectively and individually to contribute to our goal attainment.

- **Networking opportunities** with other administrators and practitioners so that what is learned can be shared with others and incorporated into the standards and quality assurance processes within the Association and throughout the field.
- **Professional support** through participation with colleagues and peers both in the Association activities and in home visitation service delivery programs.
- **Recognition & Advocacy.** AHVNA helps to ensure our voice is heard and has an impact on decisions affecting programs and ultimately our families. There is power in numbers. The Association's advocacy on behalf of the agencies delivering these important services is invaluable. AHVNA is enjoying recognition for providing quality supports, training and technology that bring life and meaning to early intervention and prevention.
- **Quality assurance and standards.** AHVNA members have raised the level of professionalism and credibility of the important work of home visitation through the development of Alberta home visitation guidelines. AHVNA participates in tracking the effectiveness of home visitation through the collaborative efforts of Alberta Child and Family Services and CORI. The accumulative provincial outcomes can further the awareness and need to fund early intervention programs as a whole as well as provide individual agencies with access to meaningful data to support their own local funding applications.
- **Forums for member input.** Regular network meetings and the Annual General Meetings are designed to provide members with educational opportunities as well as input into the operations

and direction of this member-driven association.

- **Regional training sessions.** AHVNA facilitates educational opportunities directly to member agencies. AHVNA provides unique opportunities for members to be trained as facilitators in areas such as reflective supervision. This translates into sustained training that helps maintain the integrity of the provincial guidelines. Trained facilitators take home the benefits of their acquired expertise to their local agencies.
- **Job opportunities and advancement.** Through access to the Association's extensive provincial contacts, agencies seeking qualified professionals can rely on AHVNA to post job opportunities and provide an avenue to recruit skilled individuals and share in strategies for staff retention and advocacy.
- **Resources.** AHVNA members have access to a broad range of research and resources that promote program development and integrity.

As agency directors, we are mindful of setting goals toward the most important outcomes—the benefits for our children and families. Our home visitors/family support workers need to be assured that they have the means, skill set and support to offer families what they need to achieve their goals. We thank the AHVNA membership for the years of dedicated work and commitment that directly strengthens our agency and most importantly, fuels the passion that is reflected in the work we do together with families day by day.

*Marianne Dickson is Executive Director of Wild Rose Community Connections in Okotoks.*



## Coming Up

The next issue of Connections will focus on the theme of mental health.

## Hearing From You

**Connections** is published three times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any correspondence to: Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA Provincial Director, at 780-429-4787 or email: [info@ahvna.org](mailto:info@ahvna.org)

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# Meet our Board and Staff!

In the past few issues of Connections, we have been featuring some of the faces and names behind the scenes at the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association.



AHVNA board chair **Marianne Symons** became the program manager for the Calgary Regional Home Visitation Collaborative in 2000. She has a social work background and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her work with children and families. Since becoming a member of AHVNA, Marianne has been actively involved in the research/evaluation and the education/training committees. She has gained a great deal of insight into the intricacies of home visitation. As a result she has been able to impact home visitation at both the regional and provincial level. Marianne has a strong belief in home visitation and its positive impact on the children and families served. Marianne became the chairperson of the AHVNA board in 2006. She is passionate about supporting the purpose of AHVNA and home visitation in the province of Alberta.



**Lavonne Roloff** is the Provincial Director for AHVNA. She started with the association in August 2002 as the coordinator and in December 2006 the position changed to Provincial Director. She has a family studies background and is a registered social worker. Lavonne has worked in family resource programs as well as set up a home visitation program in Region 7. She has worked with and for families whether directly or through facilitating parenting programs. Lavonne has served on a number of boards and is currently the western representative for FRP Canada. As a result she has been able to increase the awareness of home visitation at the regional, provincial and national levels. She believes in the importance of the early years and the impact that programs such as home visitation are able to have for families. Children are our future.