

# LiveUnited

Parents As Teachers



PHOTOS: UNITED WAY

Developing relationships and activities for parents and their children is part of the mission of Yankton County Parents as Teachers.



PHOTO: UNITED WAY

The board for Yankton County Parents as Teachers, which helps guide parents with kids up to age 3.

## Education Is The Soul And The Mission Of Parents As Teachers

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When it comes to educating children, a child's first and most important teacher is its parents.

For that reason, Yankton County Parents as Teachers works with area families to help guide parents with children prenatal to age 3.

Yankton County Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a home visitation and family support program that focuses on early childhood development for children. The PAT program consists of weekly to monthly home visits, depending on the family and its needs.

The educator, child and parent spend time focused just on the child and the relationship between parent and child.

Parents as Teachers has been in Yankton since 1995. During 2015 they served 23 families with 196 visits, 30 developmental screenings, 161 books given away and 35 children were provided services. This year is looking equally as busy as PAT is currently serving 11 families and has a waiting list of three.

The families are given books, ideas for age-appropriate activities, and helpful information about what their child is going through at that stage in his or her life. Parents are also given the opportunity to meet other parents when they attend group meetings held throughout the year on a wide range of topics.

"It is always fun to watch the children's faces light up when I have found that perfect book for them," says Deanna Branaugh, parent educator/coordinator for the program. "One little boy just loves airplanes, while another girl loves Minnie Mouse. Stickers are always popular and it is fascinating to watch them try to get the paper off the back of the sticker or to be able to manipulate a scissors after numerous attempts."

She said parents are always thankful when a topic discussed helps their families, and that they are curious.

"The children want to know what the activity will be and

what book they might receive," Branaugh said. "The parents want suggestions on working with their children and helping them to reach their developmental milestones. Parents are the first and most important teachers and providers for their children. Through this program, parents are provided support during the critical first years of life."

She noted that the Parents as Teachers program centers around a three-part approach.

"Parent Child Interaction is activity based and the parent and child work on an activity together with guidance and suggestions from the educator," she said. "These activities might include a tummy time activity or helping a child stack and sort blocks."

"Development-Centered Parenting will explore the ages and stages that a child goes through and provide help and support in areas such as weaning from the bottle, toilet training, discipline of the child, and learning to use a scissors for the first time, etc."

The third phase is Family Well Being.

"(This) assists the family in finding community resources to help with job or housing searches," Branaugh said. "This is also the opportunity to encourage community events and resources such as library time, Head Start, The Banquet or Make a Difference Day coat give away. Each child receives a yearly developmental screening and milestones are tracked at visits."

Another opportunity within the program is Group Connections.

"This is an additional part of the program that allows families to gather for fun or educational programs," she said. "The families participated in a Halloween activity where they played games and received pumpkins and parents also received the opportunity to have their children fingerprinted. The fingerprint kits were provided by Modern Woodmen. During the Christmas season, PAT partnered with the Literacy Council to have Mrs.

Claus read to children at the Yankton Mall."

The group's primary funding support comes from United Way but also through donations from community groups and fundraising.

"We have been fortunate to receive donations from churches, service clubs, and the Yankton Area Foundation and Healthy Yankton," Branaugh said. "The Healthy Yankton grant allowed 3 families to plant a small planter of flowers and a small planter with lettuce. The Yankton Area Foundation Grant allowed us the opportunity to increase our library of age appropriate books dealing with biting, hitting, etc. We are blessed to live in a community where groups help us out."

Additional information regarding the Parents as Teachers program can be obtained by calling Branaugh at 605-661-4833.

Follow @shauna.marlette on Twitter.

### First-Hand

MORE THAN JUST A SERVICE FOR PARENTS, the program Parents As Teachers is a connection for parents, helping them better teach their children and prepare them for lifelong learning.

One young mother first enrolled in Parents as Teachers to improve her parenting skills with her young son.

When he was three years old, her parent educator, encouraged the mother to visit the pediatrician for his 3-year-old checkup.

"I didn't even know you were supposed to take your child for a 3-year-old checkup!" she said.

But the mother had noticed he was lagging behind in a few areas. Her concerns were confirmed when the pediatrician diagnosed Michael with autism. Thanks to early intervention, the child, now 6 years old, is a successful student and interacts with his classmates.

The family embraced the support they received. In her Native American culture, education and the practice of sharing what one has learned with others is emphasized. It's also a value she sees reflected by the Parents as Teachers mission and vision.

"Not a lot of parents take as much time as they need to with their children, and Parents as Teachers taught me how important that is in how they do in school and social relationships. With my son having autism, that made a big difference," she said. "I could have lost my child, but because of the early intervention services Parents as Teachers connected me to, I was able to have a verbal child who can interact socially now."

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