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Contra Costa Home Visiting Programs Now Serving New Dads

(Concord, Calif.) - To help new fathers bond with their babies, two home visiting programs in Contra Costa County now offer home visiting services for dads and fathers-to-be. Hello Baby and Welcome Home Baby, programs that provide home visiting services for low-income families, have hired male home visitors to help fathers become more involved in their baby's lives, which research shows produces better health and educational outcomes for children.

"Children with involved, stable fathers have fewer behavioral problems, higher educational attainment, and lower levels of emotional stress," said Odessa Caton, program director for Welcome Home Baby. "Home visiting is an effective way to reach new parents, reduce child abuse, and improve child health and development, but most programs are only for mothers. We're changing that."

Fathers or other male caregivers are eligible for this voluntary service regardless of child custody status and receive assistance with parenting, employment resources, community services, and information about infant development. The program is part of First 5 Contra Costa's \$3.6 million home visiting initiative, which provides services in Antioch, Bay Point, Concord, Martinez, Oakley, Pittsburg, Richmond, and San Pablo.

"Fathers have a much bigger role in how children develop beyond providing financial support," said Cesar Paredes, home visitor with Welcome Home Baby. "A child's first three years, the most rapid period of brain growth, are shaped by early experiences and stable relationships. Responding to cries or talking silly to babies promotes brain growth. For some fathers, this is new information and changing how they parent."

For Jeff, a Concord father of five-month-old JB, the program has been a lifeline, especially since his extended family lives out of state. Before JB was born, Jeff had no experience caring for babies so Cesar brought over a doll for Jeff to practice holding and swaddling.

"Cesar helps me with anything. He gives me information and knowledge about being a better parent and partner. Talking to him helps get things off my chest and feel less stressed," Jeff said. "I was really scared about becoming a dad, but I've come a long way. I have such a strong connection with JB. Nothing is better than those moments when he realizes I'm his father or when I hold him and he stops crying."

Engaging fathers can be challenging, but according to Paredes, "Talking sports is usually a good place to start. Then I might ask, 'So where was the baby during the game?'"

About First 5 Contra Costa

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on tobacco products to fund programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 Contra Costa has invested more than \$120 million in programs that help children grow up healthy, nurtured, and ready for school. Learn more: www.firstfivecc.org.

About Welcome Home Baby

Welcome Home Baby provides home visiting services for expecting and new parents in Antioch, Bay Point, Concord, Martinez, Oakley and Pittsburg, and is run by the nonprofit organization AspiraNet. To sign up for the program, contact 925-753-2156.

About Hello Baby

The Hello Baby home visiting program serves expecting and new parents who live in San Pablo or Richmond. The program is run by the nonprofit organization Brighter Beginnings, which provides supportive services for low-income families in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. To sign up for the program, contact 510-236-6990.

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