

Family Economic Self-Sufficiency

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NMAIMH competencies addressed:

Theoretical Foundations:

- Family relationships and dynamics
- Cultural competencies

Systems Expertise:

- Service Delivery Systems
- Community Resources

Working With Others:

- Building & maintaining relationships
- Empathy and Compassion

Direct Service Skills:

- Responding with empathy
- Advocacy
- Life skills

Thinking:

- Analyzing information
- Exercising Sound Judgement
- Maintaining Perspective

New Mexico is the Land of Enchantment, with her beautiful landscapes, her deep roots for art and culture, her tantalizing cuisine and the rich diversity of her people. New Mexico can also be a tough place to live as the weather is fickle, moisture can be minimal, and the winds are sometimes harsh. It can also be a hard place to start out in life. There are an estimated 116,978 families in New Mexico, and 27.4% live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). In New Mexico, there are 22, 966 annual births, and seventy-two percent of those babies are born on Medicaid. (US Census ACS, one year data from 2017-2019, tables 801001 and 817001, US Census ACS, one year data from 2019, table 51702, and PRB analysis of ACS data)

The great news is that New Mexico has a multitude of Early Childhood programs, sponsored by the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) of the State of New Mexico. Home Visiting programs are one of the resources available, as thirty-three of these programs are supported by the ECECD. In addition, there are private and tribal home visiting programs located across the five regions of New Mexico. All of these programs have a primal focus—to enhance the quality of life for the babies and families here. ECECD-Funded Home Visiting programs served 3816 families in FY2020. The stated mission of these programs is “to support New Mexico families to raise healthy, happy and successful children.” The Mission Statement of the ECECD is

“to optimize the health, development, education and well-being of babies, toddlers and preschoolers through a family-driven, equitable, community-based system of high-quality prenatal and early childhood programs and services.”

Home Visitors working in the field with families bring this mission alive. They provide information on pregnancy and delivery, infant development including Infant Mental Health, brain development, children’s growth and development, family dynamics and strengths, and support systems present in the community to provide assistance to families and care takers. These Home Visitors are the front line of resources and support. Some basic premises of the work include that Home Visitors suspend judgement, leave biases at the door, and meet the family where they are.

Perhaps we begin our conversation with families with the questions “What are your dreams?” or “What do you wish for you and your family?” This provides us with some direction that we could take to walk together with the family. Focusing on their strengths, we consider options to leverage those strengths and to build upon them. From here, we weave in goals for the family to help them to achieve a greater level of self-sufficiency. This could include several different kinds of life skills training—communication, computer literacy, financial literacy, parenting, hygiene, basic safety, etc. For example, if the family has a source of income, you may want to focus on life skills around financial skills and learning how to effectively use that money—banking skills or approaches to starting a savings plan may be beneficial. Use the family’s dreams to drive your guidance to help them actualize those desires!

In order to understand this through the lens of a new parent or caretaker in New Mexico, we must consider what they hold as important. We need to understand where they are and what they consider to be non-negotiable for them. For example, maybe the goal for some has been to own their own home. While this might be considered a standard for some people, there are alternative realities to consider. Perhaps a young parent would be just as happy living in their own rented apartment, or for another, living in a multigenerational home, it may be to have one’s own room—or even one’s own bed! The important part is to be sure to not overlay our biases onto other people. Understanding the uniqueness of each of the regions of New Mexico is critical, as the places, people and cultures are diverse.

By using the family’s strengths as a starting point, setting aside our biases, and suspending judgement, we meet the families where they are to determine next steps to support them on the path to greater self-sufficiency.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- What are the dreams for the family you support?

- How could you encourage them to pursue life skills that would put them on the path towards achieving their dreams?
 - What are some other supports the family can rely on?
 - Are there any additional supports you could suggest that they may consider?
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References/Additional Resources

NMAIMH Keynote address, Dr. Rosemary Allen, Diversity, inclusion and Equity Principles in Work with Infants, Children and Families 1/22/21
US Census ACS, one year data from 2017-2019, tables 801001 and 817001
US Census ACS, one year data from 2019, table 51702, and PRB analysis of ACS data
NM Birth data count 2015 data
ECECD Home Visiting PowerPoint, Third Quarter Home Visiting meeting, 2/25/21