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Children & Family Services Division Office of Child Abuse Prevention

SPECIAL START TRAINING PROGRAM

Trained professionals assist parents with infants leaving Neonatal intensive care unit

The Special Start Training Program (SSTP) had been funded by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) until June 30, 2011, using federal Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act (CAPTA) funds before budget cuts necessitated the nonrenewal of the next three-year grant cycle that was to begin July 1, 2011. It is hoped that funding may become available in the future to once again target a program for the premature high risk infant. One purpose of CAPTA funds is to develop, implement, or operate programs that assist, obtain, or coordinate necessary services for families of disabled infants with life-threatening issues. The SSTP had trained community professionals who work with biological parents, foster parents, or caregivers in the home environment of the infant after discharge from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

In California, currently, there are 22 Level-3 regional NICUs, 22 Level-2 NICUs, and 72 Community (or Level-1) NICUs in medical facilities across the State. The grant for this training had been awarded to the University of California at San Francisco Medical Center. The medical center has a leading Level-3 regional NICU with a new state-of-the-art neuro-intensive NICU. The SSTP teaches specifics of the developmental needs of the medically fragile infant upon discharge from the NICU. The training not only educates the caregivers about developmental needs but also instructs the parents/caregivers in reading the infants' cues and in appropriately responding to these cues. This early intervention encourages relationship bonding while facilitating the infants' development with proven positive results.

Prematurity has been found to be a risk factor for child abuse and neglect. Premature and low birth weight births have been increasing in California, which has resulted in a growing need for SSTP training. Because of the special needs of infants being discharged from NICUs, parents are not always equipped to properly care for them without some kind of specialized training.

Historically, professionals, caregivers, and parents had been receiving one-day, on-site trainings which were typically held throughout the state. In addition, a three-day practicum was offered at the SSTP offices. The on-site trainings had proven effective in providing essential education and training for individuals working with parents and families responsible for caring for infants. In response to the increasing numbers of infants in the NICUs, the SSTP had expanded to include Webcasting. A series of Webcasts were developed during the program's initial three years to increase the number of potential trainees. These webinars may be viewed at www.vimeo.com/9412114 and are listed below.

1. The Development of Self Regulation in the High Risk Infant;
2. Fetal and Newborn Sensory Development;
3. Transitioning from the NICU to Home: Parents Tell their Stories;
4. Medical Issues of Graduates from the NICU;
5. Behavioral interventions for Support of High Risk Newborns in the NICU;
6. Behavioral issues of Newborns after Discharge from the NICU;
7. Partnering with Families: A Strength Based and Early Relationship Approach to Home Visiting;