

United Way: Program helps parents get newborns off to quick start

by Bob Shiles, Staff Writer



This is another in a series of articles on agencies that receive funding from the Robeson County chapter of United Way — editor.

LUMBERTON —When Fairmont resident Hector Miray first learned that he was going to be a father, he decided right away that he was going to search out all of the information available about parenting.

“It was important to me that I be a good father,” he said. “I didn’t grow up with a father.”

His quest led him to the Robeson County Partnership for Children — the agency that oversees local Smart Start initiatives in Robeson County — where he was introduced to the Born Learning program. Born Learning is a national campaign focused on the creation of early learning opportunities for young children. Its goal is to help parents, grandparents and caregivers explore ways to turn everyday moments and activities — such as meals, bedtime, grocery shopping and doing the laundry — into fun learning opportunities.

“The Born Learning Campaign gives parents ideas to interact with their children positively,” said Tanya Underwood, who administers the United Way-funded program. “Parents can utilize the information and then cater the ideas to their own family, creating their own personalized routines and games.”

According to Underwood, Born Learning has been a United Way-funded program in Robeson

County since 2007. This year, she said, the Partnership's goal is to reach 3,000 county residents with materials packed with all kinds of parenting tips and suggestions for making everyday activities positive learning experiences for young children. She said there are enough materials available this year to supply the information to 5,000 people.

In addition to the written materials, which are offered in both English and Spanish, those participating in the program can attend sessions offered periodically during which certain topics covered by the materials are explained. Underwood said that the materials are also incorporated into other early childhood curriculum, including those offered to new families by the Robeson County Health Department and to new mothers battling with addictions at Our House, in Pembroke.

Underwood said it's up to individual parents, grandparents and guardians to follow the tips and information provided.

"Every \$1 invested in early childhood education saves \$17 later on," she said. "If one page of the information provided is used, this program is well worth it."

Jessica Lowery Collins, the Partnership's executive director, couldn't agree more with Underwood's assessment.

"Eighty percent of brain development occurs by the age of 3, but only 4 percent of educational dollars are spent by then," she said. "The Born Learning campaign dovetails with the mission of Smart Start. The goal is to better educate children so their future will be brighter."

Miray's daughter Rosa is now almost 2, and he says he and his wife Danyelle still refer to the helpful parenting tips and ideas provided by Born Learning.

"These are helpful hints about how to be involved in your child's life," Hector said. "These are basic hints that every parent should already know and be incorporating into their lives and the lives of their children."

"It's the simple things, like spending quality time with your child, that makes the most impact on a child's life. These are simple things, but they are also the things that can be most easily forgotten."

Danyelle also encourages the use of Born Learning tips and ideas for interacting with young children.

"The program encourages such things as playtime and social interaction," she said. "Children learn faster if stimulated."

"The program is easy to follow. It is always better if there are two parents working together, but if a parent is raising a child alone, this program is also helpful and easy to follow."

Underwood noted that based on availability Born Learning materials are free to those wanting to utilize the program. More information is available on the Internet at www.bornlearning.org, or by calling Underwood at (910) 738-6767.