

“Training Head Start Staff as Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians”

Citrus County Health Department, Inverness, Florida

Submitted by Sue Littnan, Health Educator (susan_littnan@doh.state.fl.us)

Program Description

The Health Department has coordinated a comprehensive Child Passenger Safety Program in the community for the past 9 years which includes car seat safety education, car seat inspections and low cost car seat distribution. With one instructor on staff 32 hours weekly, we had continued success in reducing the misuse rate for many children in safety seats. However, we saw that there were still many children riding unrestrained; not correctly secured, or in a car seat that was inappropriate for their size. This is a very rural community and many of the families are very low income. A large majority of the children were in Head Start and Early Head Start facilities. Many of these families were not taking advantage of the low cost car seat distribution program or car seat safety checkups. Even though we do reach a large segment of our community, we had to find a way to target the neediest and ensure that these children were transported safely. To increase the number of car seat inspections, I invited the Head Start director and one of her site managers to attend the National Child Passenger Safety Technician Certification training, and they completed the four-day program. Now that there are two certified technicians on the Head Start staff, the three of us have been able to have regularly scheduled car seat inspections at all the Head Start sites. The families are given an appointment and all are encouraged to have their car seats checked. A copy of the inspection form is included in the child's folder and updated as needed. We have greatly reduced misuse, and replaced many of the old, damaged or inappropriate car seats.

Innovative Characteristics & Program Impact

Having certified child passenger safety technicians on staff of the day cares has helped expand the scope of the car seat safety program in our community. After the first check up event, where 9 out of 13 car seats had to be replaced, the staff decided to have car seats checked on a regular basis. Families were given the results of the check up events to show the extent of the misuse and participants were able to obtain a new, safe car seat for their child. Families are now more than willing to sign up for upcoming inspections. Now the word has spread to other day care facilities and preschools in our county, and they too are arranging inspection dates. One barrier was convincing the parents that the car seat safety check up was for education and not enforcement. Car seat inspections were not well attended due to this misconception. Having Head Start staff become certified technicians greatly helped this issue. The Head Start staff members work with these families on a daily basis and have their trust. One of the most important outcomes is the decrease in car seat misuse rate. Overall, the misuse rate has dropped from 86% to 80% since adding this service to the car seat safety program in September. The partnership between the Health Department and the Head Start has been strengthened, which opens the door for all Health Department services to be welcomed by Head Start families. The response from the families has been outstanding. Once several car seat inspections were completed, word spread and set off requests for a continuous check up schedule for Head Start.