

Executive Summary

A Summative Evaluation of *PARENTING WORKS!*

Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG) of Cambridge, Massachusetts was contracted by Blue Penguin Productions and Parenting Resources, Inc. to conduct a qualitative summative evaluation of *Parenting Works!*. The goals of the evaluation were to determine the program's appeal and assess the viewers' application of content.

The evaluation study was carried out with 49 parents in five cities: Lowell, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Falls Church, Virginia; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; and a Spanish-speaking group of parents in Redwood City, California. Most of the sample were women; about a fifth were men. Half the parents were single parents. Nearly half the sample was White or Caucasian; about a third were Latino or Hispanic; and a fifth were Black or African American. Parents viewed six to eight episodes of the series. Data collection included telephone interviews, focus groups, and written surveys.

An additional piece of the evaluation was to conduct a modest assessment of the outreach activities accompanying the series in five cities: Boston, Denver, Kansas City, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and San Francisco. The assessment included telephone interviews with the outreach coordinators at the local public television stations and with organizational contacts in each city.

KEY FINDINGS

Application of *Parenting Works!* Content

- One month after viewing the series, each of the 25 parents interviewed had good recall of the information presented in the series and had applied a specific tip or suggestion from the series to his or her own life.
- Central themes in focus groups and telephone interviews with parents included the following:
 - Parents felt validated by the series and it helped them to realize they were not alone in the issues and challenges they faced as parents;
 - The information presented in the series reinforced many of parents' existing child rearing attitudes and practices;
 - The series helped parents improve their communication skills with their children and with one another;

- The series encouraged parents to be patient with their children and with themselves; and
- The series elicited meaningful group discussions about parents' own upbringings that helped them reflect on their own parenting.
- Parent group facilitators found the series useful in: presenting general parenting skills; teaching new parenting strategies; serving as an introduction to the developmental appropriateness of children's behavior; helping parents understand that children's behavior is a form of communication; and in making parents feel they were not alone. Two of the five facilitators, while they found the series enlightening, felt it could have been stronger had it imparted more specific information.
- Compared to pre-test reports, parents reported less difficulty in eight of 13 parenting situations after watching the shows. These included: bedtime, decisions about TV viewing, mealtimes, children acting up in public, making playtime educational, teaching safety, teaching responsibility, and finding babysitters.
- Changes in parents' attitudes about their role as a parent were noted from pre- to post-test on written surveys. Areas in which positive changes for parents were evident included: how much they liked being a parent, encouraging their children to express ideas, how interesting they found it to be with their children, and how they felt when they were with their children.

The Appeal of *Parenting Works!*

- Parents were extremely positive about the *Parenting Works!* series overall and nearly all the parents rated (on a four-point scale) the various aspects of the series as *excellent* or *good*; only 3-6% of the ratings were *fair*, and none were *poor*. Parents were most strongly positive about the parenting tips presented

at the end of each show. Compared to the other aspects of the series, they were slightly less enthusiastic about the video clips.
- Parent educators who facilitated the parent groups were also positive about the series overall; they were very positive about the host, liked the broad range of topics covered in the series, and felt there was a good cross-section of parents featured in the series.
- Parents involved in the evaluation could relate to the parents featured in the series and preferred receiving information from them rather than parenting "experts."
- Parents preferred *Parenting Works!* to other parenting information resources, including another parenting show.

Outreach

- Kansas City had launched an impressive outreach campaign. At the heart of the campaign was a partnership forged between KCPT and a collaboration of 18 organizations, known as Home Front. Together they established a parenting information line, promoted in conjunction with the series. Between October 15th and January 10th, the Home Front line handled 600 calls. In addition, several of the Home Front organizations had successfully incorporated the series and outreach materials into their programs.
- The major outreach in Minneapolis/St. Paul was carried out by the United Way and involved distribution of materials to 2,500 organizations with suggestions on how to use the materials.
- The project's main outreach in the San Francisco area will be with the Sheriff's Department. The station will sponsor a training for Sheriff's Department personnel from the four jails in the area on incorporating the project into the educational programs they offer to inmates, 80% of whom are parents.
- In Boston, materials were distributed at two community parenting events and to 13 child care resource and referral centers. In addition, the project was described in a WGBH newsletter that went out to 2,000 organizations; a telephone number was listed to call and receive free materials. They fielded 34 calls from organizations and individuals.
- Outreach events in the Denver area included a workshop with the Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children and a launch event at the Governor's mansion. KRMA mailed project materials to 200 child care providers and distributed print materials to 45 providers who attended workshops at the station. Another mailing was undertaken in concert with the Colorado Department of Education to 200 adult and family literacy providers. Following this mailing, the station received about 20 calls from literacy providers who were interested in the tapes and print materials.