

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD

2014

Responding to community needs Prince Edward Family Health Team

Breaking down big barriers for small babies



Young families living in the neighbouring counties of Hastings and Prince Edward face serious barriers to health. Rates of illiteracy, teen pregnancy and smoking are among the highest reported in Ontario, and there is a high level of food insecurity as well, according to a 2013 report published by the Community Foundation of Canada.

Growing up in a disadvantaged family can lead to a lifetime of problems for a child; factors ranging from social status and education levels of parents to income, adequate food and social support all have long-term effects on health. And that's why primary care teams in Ontario know their work has to go beyond simply treating illnesses to improving the overall health of the community.

Where better to start that task than with its youngest members? That's what the Prince Edward Family Health Team did with its well-baby program, which has won the 2014 Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario Bright Lights Award for responding to community needs. This program for parents and babies aims to increase the chances of children and their families to live a healthy life.

The Prince Edward FHT program goes beyond traditional well-baby visits by a doctor or nurse proffering advice on child care. Instead, it's an integrated model that involves a mix of providers who link families with community resources from the start. FHT staff can help connect families with services, and its outreach nurse is instrumental in helping families keep on top of immunization and tracking growth and development milestones.

New mothers can attend "Babeez 'n' Arms," a weekly drop-in meeting where they can talk with other mums or speak with the outreach nurse about parenting issues; another group is focused on teen mothers.

The Prince Edward team also helps new parents seek out the resources they need to care for their families. In 2011, only 34 children were referred to community programs and services for early childhood support; the next year, that number was 147. More children were also sent for help with speech, language and hearing problems.

Getting babies off to a good start makes a tremendous difference to their long-term health. The Prince Edward FHT is doing its best to improve things now for healthier patients in the future.