

OHIO'S ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND RESPONSIBLE PARENTING

Cohort 1: Brief 1



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INTRODUCTION

This document serves as an intervention design report for Cohort 1 of the Charting a Course for Economic Mobility and Responsible Parenting (EMRP) project in Ohio. The EMRP project aims to educate teens and young adults about the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood. The entities involved with Cohort 1 of the EMRP project include the Office of Child Support (OCS), the Gallia County and Lucas County Child Support Enforcement Agencies (CSEAs), and other community organizations. These groups partner on the project to implement the No Kidding Ohio (NKO) curriculum which is a peer-to-peer approach that educates youth and young adults about the practical realities of young parenting.

The Ohio program is supported by a federal grant from the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) for implementing the EMRP project with the NKO curriculum. OCS is the lead agency for NKO implementation.





OVERVIEW

ODJFS was awarded a three-year grant in 2020 to develop and implement the EMRP project. As the lead agency for the life of this grant, OCS provides programmatic oversight, direction, fiscal support, and administrative support. OCS contracted with Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service to lead a program evaluation. Cohort 1 of EMRP, managed by two Child Support Enforcement Agency implementation sites, deliver services in Gallia County and Lucas County. Ohio has chosen the NKO curriculum which promotes the success sequence (completing an education, starting a career, and entering a committed relationship before parenthood) among teens and young adults. The target audiences for the intervention are teens and young adults aged 13-25.

The Cohort 1 sites employ project managers to assist with planning and program implementation as well as providing outreach to community partners and sustainability activities (e.g., adaptability of program implementation, strategic partnership/coalition planning, adhering to program evaluation protocols). The sites also employ young parents as peer educators to teach other teens and young adults about the rights and responsibilities of being a young parent through their own lived experiences. The peer educators receive 162 hours of training related to the curriculum as well as tailored support and education based on their individual needs and interests. The sites work with community partners (e.g., schools, foster homes, faith-based organizations, fatherhood programs, and soup kitchens) to support the peer educators.

No Kidding Ohio was originally created in 2010 through an 18-month demonstration project operated by the ODJFS Office of Workforce Development and the Office of Child Support programs in Franklin and Fairfield counties. Through the 2020 EMRP grant, the NKO curriculum was revised and updated with current Ohio child support program information and objectives. The curriculum also added a topic on healthy and unhealthy relationships.

The No Kidding Ohio curriculum is based on the well-respected “No Kidding: Straight Talk from Teen Parents” curriculum created by the Texas Office of Attorney General’s Child Support program and YouthLaunch, a Texas youth service and leadership program who was their contracted partner. No Kidding is a condensed version of the PAPA program, also developed in Texas. PAPA is an evidence-based education curriculum designed for young adults to teach the benefits of delaying parenthood until completing their education; starting a career; and entering a stable, committed relationship.



Peer Educator presenting NKO



OBJECTIVES

The EMRP program has three primary objectives:

1. Provide success sequence training to teens and young adults
2. Extend an opportunity and experience to young parents who will be peer-to-peer trainers (peer educators) for the NKO curriculum
3. Align the NKO curriculum to Ohio's child support program objectives

The goal is to impart youth and young adult participants with knowledge that will likely contribute to long-term results.

Provide Success Sequence Training to Teens and Young Adults

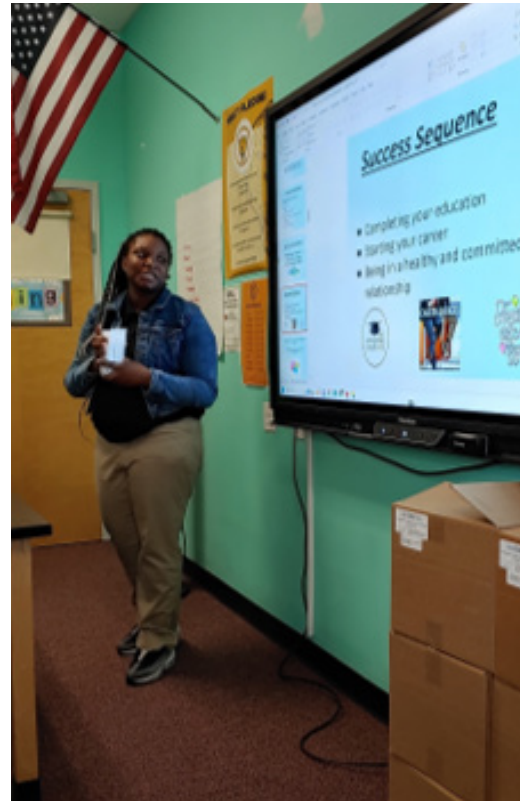
Drawing upon child support knowledge, NKO sites partner with community organizations to implement the NKO curriculum. With trained peer educators delivering the curriculum, teens and young adults are guided toward the success sequence described in the training: complete their education; start a career; and enter a committed relationship so they are financially, legally, and emotionally ready before becoming a parent. Using the NKO curriculum, this program provides participants with information on parental rights and responsibilities, differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, increased economic mobility, and services offered by the child support program.

Extend Opportunity and Experience to Peer-to-Peer Educators

Because the model for the NKO program is a peer-to-peer delivery of the curriculum, young parents need to be recruited to become trained and serve as peer educators. The Ohio implementation site staff report that word of mouth and referrals from other agencies are effective recruitment strategies. The timing of hiring and training peer educators is important to consider. It may help to identify the school and community entities that serve the target population in advance for

delivering the NKO sessions so that peer educators can deliver the curriculum upon completion of the training. Other important factors to consider are the wages offered to the peer educators and whether they are full- or part-time employees. These factors can affect peer educator retention if they are making attractive wages or receive employee benefits.

The peer educators learn about the child support program to better understand the NKO curriculum that they are presenting. The peer educators learn about their rights and responsibilities to benefit their own children. As the NKO curriculum is designed to assist with strengthening families in local communities, the EMRP project provides teens and young adults with the tools they need so they are more likely to become self-sufficient adults and less likely to live in poverty. This project also provides opportunities for unmarried peer educators with children to achieve economic stability, learn how to co-parent, and become informed about paternity establishment and child support services. Serving as peer educators, these young parents receive training to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to help prepare them for success in their education and gain work experience.



Peer Educator presenting NKO

Align NKO Curriculum to Child Support Program Objectives

NKO is a peer-to-peer approach that provides youth with practical knowledge and education about the realities of young parenting. The EMRP project aims to build on the existing NKO curriculum, make enhancements by leveraging child support program knowledge in Gallia and Lucas Counties and at OCS, and implement the NKO curriculum with youth and young adult participants. The goal is to motivate more teens and young adults throughout Ohio to follow the success sequence and become economically self-sufficient adults by having increased knowledge and awareness of the challenges of being a young parent, how to achieve financial stability, and services offered by child support programs. Additionally, the peer educators benefit by receiving paid work experience with the opportunity to gain leadership and job skills, build social networks, receive education and mentorship opportunities, and make a positive difference with their peers and within their community.



INTERVENTION DESIGN

The NKO curriculum is delivered by peer educators who are young parents in a similar age group as the students. The EMRP program has two targeted service populations: the students (or youth and young adult participants) and the trained peer educators. The students hear messages about paternity and parenting from peers who know the challenges firsthand and speak to the students in a way that they can relate to their own experiences. The peer educators gain experience in community service, employment, and professional skills in communication, teamwork, public speaking, and problem solving.

The following describes the three-session intervention design deployed in Gallia and Lucas Counties. These activities all aim to support teens and young adults by providing knowledge, skills, and access to resources that will likely lead them to successfully pursuing and achieving life goals. The EMRP program uses the NKO curriculum, which is divided into three 50-minute sessions.

Session 1. “Telling Our Stories”

Students learn about the challenges of becoming a young parent. After a short introduction, the youth participants discuss one goal they have for their future. Then, imagining they have just become a parent, the students reflect on how becoming a parent now will change their life and impact the goal(s) they identified. Following this exercise, the youth participants hear stories from the peer educators about their lived experiences as young parents (for example, with pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting). In addition to answering questions, the stories provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their own lives and how having a child at a young age would affect them. After telling their stories, the peer educators identify five struggles they are facing and explain how those struggles impact their lives. Additionally, the youth participants learn how to identify ideal conditions to have in place before becoming a parent.

Session 2. “Understanding Parenting”

The primary emphasis of this section is paternity. Following a short introduction and summary of the previous lesson, the peer educators run a short activity to stimulate reflection on fatherhood. The students then learn the differences between a biological father, a legal father, and a dad. After this discussion, the peer educators focus on the methods of establishing legal paternity. In addition to exploring the legal complications that exist when a child is born to unwed parents, the students learn the three ways to establish paternity and how to legally become a father. The students then learn about benefits for the family once legal paternity has been established. Session 2 continues with the youth participants watching a short video on fatherhood. After the conclusion of the video, the students discuss the importance of a father in a child’s life. Additionally, the youth participants brainstorm ideal conditions to have in place before having a baby. The peer educators close Session 2 with important take home messages and a quick review of the session’s content.

Session 3. “Child Support and Money Matters”

In the final section of the NKO curriculum, students learn about the services offered by the child support program. The focus is on the resources and services that parents need to raise a child and the financial burden that teen parents face compared to non-parenting teens. The session begins with a conversation about what the child support program is and the types of services they offer. Following this conversation, the students play the “\$20 Game,” where they imagine how they would spend \$20 if they found it and compare those responses with the way peer educators would spend the money. Session 3 continues with another game, “Babies Cost What?” This second game is like the consumer-oriented television show “The Price Is Right.” The goal is to find out what students know about the real cost of specific infant expenses (e.g., formula, diapers, etc.). With this information, the students once again brainstorm ideal conditions to have in place before having a child. The session continues with a third game, “Jeopardy,” which tests students’ knowledge from all three sessions. The third session concludes with facts about child support, the importance of having two parents support a child, and the most important messages they hope students take with them.





PROGRAM PLANNING AND COLLABORATIONS

To facilitate implementation of the EMRP program, the sites developed plans and identified community partners for collaboration. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the implementation of the programming and presented challenges to carrying out the project as originally proposed. There was difficulty with hiring coordinator staff and peer educators. Temporary hiring agency services were explored as a possibility to employ the peer educators since their employment is grant-funded. One lesson learned is to explore the county or organization's hiring process and options early when planning to set up the new program. Another is to maintain flexibility throughout the planning and early implementation of the program. The turnover experienced with peer educators has prompted the sites to adjust the group curriculum training to a more individual training process for new peer educators. Having the ability to observe other peer educators present the curriculum in schools and other community settings facilitates their learning of the curriculum and their role.

Working with community partners is an integral component to this project's success. Gallia and Lucas counties and OCS staff have well-established working relationships with their partners. The partners provide peer educator referrals and recruitment support and help with program design and implementation. Although both counties implement the NKO program and use peer educators to deliver the educational material, each county tailors the program to meet the needs of its target population and specific site location. The following describes the program planning and collaboration activities in Gallia and Lucas Counties that support the EMRP project.



IMPLEMENTATION SITE LEADS



Gallia County

Gallia is a rural Southeast Ohio county and a part of the Appalachian region. Within the county, there are two public school districts and one private school. The Gallia County EMRP site lead is the local child support enforcement agency, which collaborated with the Gallia-Vinton Educational Service Center (ESC) as a sub-grant recipient. The ESC employs the site coordinator and provides office space and other support. Working through the ESC has been effective for engaging with school districts, as the ESC already works extensively with the schools. The coordinator trains the peer educators and supports them in presenting the NKO curriculum at schools within the county and in schools in neighboring counties. They also present the program during after-school and summer programs offered through the ESC, community-serving non-profit organizations, and the public library.



Lucas County

Lucas is a Northwest Ohio county and is much more populated and urban as it includes the city of Toledo. It also includes Toledo Public Schools, 10 additional public school districts, and many private schools. The Lucas EMRP site lead is the local child support enforcement agency which employs the agency and community outreach coordinator and houses the project. The coordinator trains the peer educators and supports them in presenting the NKO curriculum in public and private schools as well as college upward bound and other youth-serving community programs. Peer educators can be promoted to peer mentors after acquiring the NKO content knowledge and leadership skillset to support new peer educators.



TARGET POPULATIONS FOR GRANT ACTIVITIES

As noted above, the EMRP program aims to serve two populations: the students and the peer educators. Within these two populations, there are sub-populations. The two implementation sites, Gallia and Lucas Counties, each have their own target sub-populations.

The Gallia County program targets teens and young adults, between the ages of 13 and 19 who are enrolled in middle and high school (grades 7-12), to receive the NKO curriculum. The target age for peer educators is 18-25 years old.

The Lucas County program targets youth from 16 to 25 years old for both the student and peer educator populations. Lucas County has prioritized gaining access to Toledo Public Schools to present the NKO curriculum to the student body. Lucas County also targets individuals under the care of Lucas County Children Services. The individuals are identified with assistance from community partners and local courts. The Lucas County EMRP program expected to accommodate 50-100 participants each month through classroom visits, Zoom presentations, after-school programming, and community partners.





PROGRAM EVALUATION

To assess the implementation and outcomes of the Ohio EMRP program, OCS engaged Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service. The staff at the Voinovich School are conducting a mixed methods evaluation of the EMRP program in Ohio.

The overall evaluation objectives are:

- Collaborate with ODJFS OCS to refine the NKO programming and data collection instruments
- Conduct a process evaluation of the implementation of the EMRP grant in the identified counties
- Collect peer educator and youth participant data to evaluate the NKO impact on short- and long-term youth outcomes
- Recruit and incentivize a comparison group of youth to evaluate the impact of the NKO short-term outcomes
- Broadly disseminate findings of the EMRP evaluation

Some of the evaluation activities include:

- Working with the OCS staff on developing data collection tools
- Providing data collection tools to the sites. For example, participant attendance forms, participant pre-post instruments to measure knowledge and intention gains, peer educator baseline and post assessment, and community partner evaluation forms
- Developing data collection guidance documents for the sites to understand the data collection needed for the evaluation
- Conducting quarterly site visits to understand implementation facilitators and barriers at the local level
- Conducting peer educator interviews to understand additional impacts on these young parents
- Analyzing data and sharing findings with the sites, OCS, and OCSS



SUMMARY

The EMRP program and the NKO curriculum provide an opportunity to build evidence about an innovative peer-to-peer approach educating youth on the practical realities of young parenting. The goal of the EMRP program is to supply the youth participants with skills that will likely contribute to long-term results. The evaluation activities will provide evidence on the implementation and impacts of the EMRP program using the NKO curriculum which may guide CSEA activity in the coming years.