



The Problem

Our youngest children, ages 0-2, average 2.5 hours of screen time (TV, tablet, phone) per day. This is a critical time in a child's development with a baby's brain tripling in size in the first two years. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests less than one hour of daily screen time for toddlers.

Too often parents don't see themselves as their child's best teachers. And video programs promoting themselves as "educational" only perpetuate that myth. "TVs and screens cannot give a child the contact that parents do, and that contact is critical to the little one's development," said Kathy Mullally, Director – Northwest Connection Family Resources.

The Solution

Northwest Connection Family Resources (NCFR) strives to build strong families and do that through parent education, play groups, and a strategic focus on literacy.

"We cannot emphasize enough how important play is for young children," said Mullally. "They learn about themselves and the world through it, and it is important for parents to play with their children."

NCFR provides play groups that focus on parents interacting with their children. Staff model play behavior and coach families in need of support. NCFR has offered specific playgroups for men and other family members like grandparents. NCFR has a play room and has it open for families to use throughout the week.

Parent education has also focused on prevention strategies and conversations on screen time. "We understand parents will give children some screen time so offer suggestions on what parents can do when they take the screens away," said Katie Harder, Family Support Coordinator – NCFR.

NCFR also provides a home visitation program where staff provide one-on-one support to help parents be the best parents they can be. Other services include car seat safety and parent warmlines for non-emergency parenting questions.



Literacy and play are strategic areas in early childhood parent education.

Literacy is a big focus for NCFR, and they partner with community organizations to promote reading and getting books to families. "Sometimes even reading a book can be intimidating," Harder said. "We teach parents how to look at books and tell stories to increase their comfort levels."

NCFR's service area includes Tribal families. "Culture is very important to the Tribal families we work with," said Brenda Flannery, Early Childhood Education Coordinator – NCFR. "We want to connect cultural activities to high quality interactions between parents and their children, building off the things that are important to the parents."

Results

NCFR defines success as smiles on children's faces. "When we hear the giggles of children in our building, see them enjoying reading books, and parents interacting with their children we are over-joyed," said Mullally.

Parents are also grateful for the support NCFR has provided them. One parent wrote a page-long story about the important role NCFR had played in their life and read it to the State's Joint Finance Committee when they visited the Northwoods. "That was an incredibly powerful endorsement for our work and demonstrates the power of a parent as their child's first teacher," said Mullally.