

Subject: Safe Childcare Transport: Protecting the Kids and Yourself

Good afternoon! I am back in my Maryland office, and have spent time reflecting on the new HMHB program for proper childcare transportation. The simple truth is that I could not have dreamed of better results than what actually occurred during its debut week. I want to take a moment to share some of the experience with you.

During the initial planning phase, several questions were asked: Is a statewide training program needed and wanted in the field? Can a single class be developed that is appropriate for childcare centers, home and family childcare providers, Head Start and Early Head Start transportation providers, and others who transport children? Can turn-key programming be implemented, so the busy schedules of local coordinators are not unduly taxed? Can the continuing education needs of providers, administrative personnel and certified technicians be accommodated? The answers are pretty obvious, in the highlights that follow.

The project started out with a great advantage, in that Bette Hall-Munger, Director of HMHB, had previous contact and involvement with leaders in the field. She and Patty Carrell were able to convene a meeting of the appropriate leaders, explore possibilities and concerns early, and assemble an enthusiastic team. The preparation work of HMHB also included many exchanges with Child Care Resource & Referral Agency leaders, Patty presenting to 30 Head Start leaders, attaining training credit approval from the University of Montana and Safe Kids Worldwide, developing handouts and certificates, and much more. That work, combined with resounding SKSC coordinator enthusiasm for a standardized and statewide course, provided a great source of strength.

We also had personal and professional commitment from childcare and Head Start training leaders, in each community. Not only were letters, e-mails and press releases sent out, but local training coordinators made personal phone calls to providers in their areas. Since HMHB had provided its own laptop, projector, speakers, demonstration equipment, and all handout folders, local folks could focus on the facility and the students. The results were that every community we visited enjoyed a record-breaking training turnout! By borrowing extra chairs from other building areas, we were able to accommodate everyone who wanted to be there, and we even heard requests for return visits to accommodate providers who could not attend.

Each presentation went smoothly, and attendees were actively involved. The basic content was presented and demonstrated, special handout material designed for consistency with the presentation was introduced, participant interaction and use of the materials were encouraged, and we facilitated opportunities for hands-on practice. Participants told us about transportation policies that would be reassessed, as a result of the training, along with changes that would immediately be made to reflect what we taught. Many providers will be taking advantage of resources, like the 24 inspection stations that are available throughout the state. Childcare, Head Start, Family Services, and other providers also noted that the information shared also needs to reach the families they serve, including the fact that no one is protected unless all occupants – including adults – are properly buckled. And even better than that, they recognized their own role in conveying that information. Some even expressed interest in becoming certified child passenger safety technicians!

A few current technicians also attended, to receive the continuing education credits that are available through HMHB programming. Not only did they receive up-to-date information, but they were a great help during hands-on segments and discussions of local resources. Some techs talked about improvements they can make in their own programming, and at least one mentioned a desire to become active as a certified instructor.

The week closed out with a terrific event at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy. 58 police recruits attended the HMHB occupant protection session, which has become part of their required

Basic Training. They are now better prepared to actively enforce three laws, identify gross misuse of child and adult restraints, and refer community members to certified technicians.

What a great week! Thank you to Patty, Bette, the rest of the HMHB team, and all of the childcare and Head Start leaders who made this early success possible. Special thanks are also due to the funders who supported the program development and implementation, and to the Montana Department of Transportation which paid for the first several weeks of programming.

I look forward to working with all of you, as the program continues throughout 2008, and I have attached a brief photo essay of the first week. As always, let me know if you want higher resolution copies of the pictures for newspapers, newsletters, websites, internal promotions, etc.

Stay warm!

Joe

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