

# RUSKIN TAKING OFF TO SUCCESS (TOTS)

## EAST END COMMUNITY SERVICES

### October, 2010 – January, 2012

Ruskin TOTS program finished the fifth session of programming in January, 2012. The months of June, July, August and September, 2010 were designated for hiring staff, designing curriculum, ordering supplies and recruiting parents. Our first session began on October 9, 2010. During the five sessions, we engaged 96 parents and 81 children under the age of five. Six of those parents were pregnant mothers and an additional 18 children were engaged who were over the age of five. Sixty-three percent of the parents attended at least two thirds of the group meetings and 60 parents completed all sessions of a program.

#### THE PROGRAM

Our TOTS program utilizes the *Parenting Young Children; Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Children Under Six* as the basis for our curriculum. We enhance this with several guest speakers (the library's early literacy specialist, a panel of doctors from the East Dayton Health Clinic, and the Miami Valley Child Development Center's mental health specialist) throughout the nine week session. Topics address child development, ways to stimulate learning such as dialogic reading and many other enrichment techniques that promote literacy or numerical ability, environmental toxins like lead based paint, appropriate immunizations and pediatric care and strategies for positive parenting. The sessions include: lecture, guest speakers, video, question and answer as well as hand on activities to promote parents helping their children prepare for kindergarten.

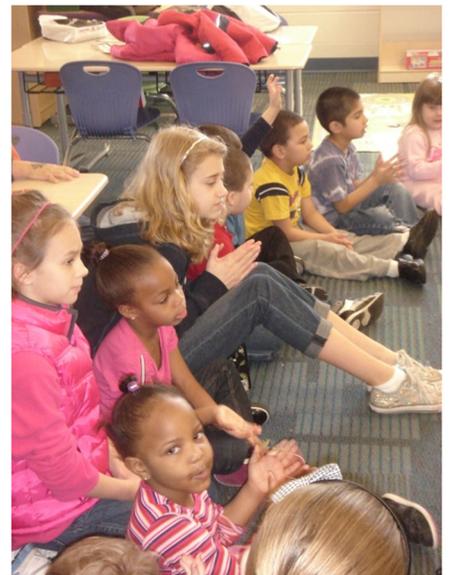


Figure 1 TOTS Children on Saturday

An integral part of the program is home visits. These give us the opportunity to talk with the parents in a more intimate manner and on their territory. Some parents have refused home visits and we respect their wishes, but have arranged some visits then at our agency or other neutral location.

We have also made referrals to other agencies for our parents who need assistance with housing, food, medical, etc. East End has an agreement with Hannah's Treasure Chest so we were able to obtain baby equipment, clothing and toys for those families in need.

## SUCSESSES

The Ruskin TOTS program has been successful in many areas. We have engaged 96 parents in building a knowledge base about kindergarten readiness and their children were involved in a multitude of kindergarten readiness skills in the child education classroom. In addition, some of the children were involved in our child programming during the week. Two days a week we facilitated a preschool, with parents present, for the 3, 4 and 5 year olds. We initiated this class because several of the parents expressed reluctance to enroll their children in other preschools, but were comfortable attending our preschool with their children. This was a double success because the children were exposed to preschool skills and the parents became familiar with those skills and therefore, could reinforce those skills at home. Another weekly addition was a "Musical TOTS" program every Friday. This was open to all ages of TOTS children and focused on music to reinforce kindergarten readiness skills. Again, parents were involved in this activity and participated with their children.

The parent and child preschool and Musical TOTS programs engage both the child and their caretaker in additional learning. The parents are able to see different ways to stimulate reading, engage children in art projects and help children verbalize their thoughts and feelings. These efforts also enable children who are not enrolled in existing preschool programs to have similar experiences, including how to follow instructions, learning about numbers, the alphabet, etc. This has been a huge success.



Figure 2 Parents at Park

After our first session (ending in January, 2011) we implemented a "TOTS Alumni" program for our first session parents. We began with a nine week nutrition program which is offered at no cost from the Ohio State Extension Office. They met at the same time on Saturdays at Ruskin

when the TOTS second session was meeting. This program has grown from an initially small number of attendees to an average of 15 parents attending each week.

Consistent with our emphasis on peer support and helping parents take a leadership role, this effort is being facilitated by two parents who had graduated from the first TOTS session. The second session of TOTS alumni began in January, 2011 with a 3 hour CPR class and 12 parents attended. Attendance continued with those numbers for the remainder of the TOTS program year. When we were planning for our six week break between program years, the TOTS alumni group continued meeting at various parks in the city, including three in our neighborhood. Again, attendance averaged 6 families per week. Since this was extremely successful and is an excellent strategy for keeping parents engaged in kindergarten readiness after TOTS and before their children start kindergarten, we have hired the two parents to facilitate the TOTS alumni. They have been involved in the planning for sessions and continue to support the parents with issues related to their children.

The TOTS program staff has engaged parents in fun stimulating activities outside of the Saturday classes. The TOTS parents have been involved in field trips with the children. In March, 2011, we hosted a Seussville activity with TOTS parents and families throughout the community that encouraged reading and activities. TOTS parents have also been engaged in activities to supervise the new KaBOOM! playground on Steele Avenue. The parents have been involved in planning other activities for parents and also in planting flowers in the park. We see the TOTS parents emerging as natural community leaders in the neighborhoods that comprise the Ruskin School Attendance Zone.



Figure 3 TOTS at a Fieldtrip

The evaluators from Wright State University and the University of Dayton have truly added value to the entire process. They started their support with the design of the program and have continued that support with evaluation, suggestions for improvement, attending sessions and interacting with the parents, and always being available for questions. Their data collection has become a part of the class and is not intrusive, but thorough.