

Conversations in Home Visiting: Listening to Home Visitors about Professional Well-Being

National Home Visiting Network

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The National Home Visiting Network was formed in 2018 to create space for critical conversations that are needed across practice, policy, and research to continuously refine and advance the field of home visiting so that more families with young children can benefit from this evidence-based service. One of our recent conversations centered on the professional well-being of the home visiting workforce.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when much of the social services infrastructure shut down, home visiting programs did not—they kept serving families, shifted to virtual visits, and provided what some families called a “lifeline” of support. The truth is that many home visitors themselves were experiencing the same challenges as the families they served—loss of loved ones, school closure, isolation, and fear. As we look back on COVID and come to terms with a new normal in our hearts and communities, it is abundantly clear that attending to the professional well-being of home visitors is critical for ensuring that they can continue to show up and provide effective support to the families they serve.

Recent studies highlight the theoretical underpinnings of workforce well-being. For example, the [Supporting and Strengthening the Home Visiting Workforce](#) study¹ funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and conducted by James Bell Associates found the following dimensions to influence outcomes for the workers as well as the children and families enrolled in the programs: job satisfaction; psychological well-being; job meaning and fulfillment; self-efficacy and confidence.

The Network appreciates the growing awareness of the need to focus on home visiting staff and recently turned to home visitors to hear directly from them. In October 2023, the Network hosted a [Rapid Response webinar on home visitor professional well-being](#). Three home visitors—Lynei Hamilton (nurse, Southcentral Foundation), Brandy Howard (early childhood specialist,

¹ Sparr, M., Morrison, C., Joraanstad, A., Cachat, P., & West, A. (2022). [Home visitor professional well-being: What it is and why it matters](#) (OPRE Report 2022-102). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation; Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

ParentChild+), and Claudette Kabera (family case manager, Community of Hope)—participated in a panel discussion and shared what professional well-being means to them and examples of when they felt that their well-being was supported. More than 1,600 people joined the webinar (either live or viewed as a recording) and engaged actively in the chat sharing even more experiences from the field. The Network hosted two office hours in March 2024 and a handful of additional home visitors joined the conversation.

Across these conversations, we heard from home visitors that professional well-being is best supported by:

A strong team

- “I rely on my team so much. We share what we are going through with the families (and personally too), and how we are doing. We text all day long to check in and support one another.”
- “When I need support, I know I can call on someone in my team to ask questions. They are on the ground and know what I may be experiencing. I would not have lasted 6 years in this job without these people.”
- “We do team building exercises—like sharing what we think each person’s superpower is. It helps to know what others see in us and how we add value.”

Programmatic flexibility to meet each family’s needs

- “It is important for me to use my knowledge of the family and the home visiting curriculum to support the family in the moment. There are always emerging needs so we need flexibility and autonomy to do our job well.”
- “I work with several families who have children with neurodiverse abilities. For one of these families, I found that conducting the visit under a table is best. There are fewer distractions, less light, and it’s just right for the child.”
- “It would be helpful if we had a booklet of resources that we could share with families...and a way, as home visitors, to tap into those resources on behalf of the families so that we know their needs will be met.”

Time to re-group between visits with families

- “We all experience vicarious trauma...taking even a little piece of another person’s trauma home with us at the end of the day can be a lot.”
- “We need to show up as our best selves for each family and to do that, we need to re-group. Maybe that is listening to a song on the way to the next visit, stopping for a coffee, going for a walk, washing my hands, or calling my co-workers.”

Attention to safety

- “The program supports us going in teams to a visit if we have any physical safety concerns. Or if we arrive and assess that it is not a safe situation, we know that the program will support us if we choose to re-schedule.”
- “I had a situation that was not environmentally safe for me, yet I was required to continue to deliver services in the family’s home. It was hazardous for me, and for the next families I saw that day.”

Access to counseling and reflective supervision

- “Having time to reflect is really important.”
- “Home visitors carry a lot on their shoulders. It would be good to have a therapist as part of the team.”
- “You are there two times a week for 23 weeks. You become part of the family, so you feel and hurt for them. A therapist on retention would help.”

Recognition for the uniqueness and importance of the job

- “Not many people understand what home visitors do. Some just think we are babysitters.”
- “Even when school is closed, our home visiting team is required to show up to work to be available for the families. It hurts though when you realize that the school doesn’t even plow the parking lot or shovel the sidewalks for us. It feels like we are overlooked and undervalued.”

Compensation that reflects the importance of home visiting for family well-being

- “We wear so many hats but our pay is not reflective of that.”
- “I have more than 25 years of experience, but because of union pay scales, I don’t even make as much as a first year teacher in our school district.”
- “There are home visitors that are in the same situations as our families with respect to food and housing insecurity, and paying our bills.”

Considerations for Systems Level Changes to Honor the Voices of Home Visitors

These insights from home visitors should cause those in home visiting leadership roles—federal and state administrators, model developers, researchers—to pause and consider what **systems level changes** can be made to address the working conditions for home visitors in order to strengthen professional well-being.

For example, state and federal administrators might consider their role in supporting systems level changes that could bring about:

- fair and equitable pay;
- access to certified mental health providers to help process stress and vicarious trauma;
- paid mental health days;
- time built into each day for home visitors to decompress; and
- stronger connections and coordination between the home visiting program and other service providers in the community.

To achieve some of these systems level changes, additional resources may be needed, coupled with clear expectations that funds be allocated to these workforce needs. For other changes, it may require allowances for existing resources to be used more flexibly to support what home visitors pinpoint as important for their professional well-being. And still for other changes, it might be about creating structures that can adapt and respond to local home visitor emergent needs.

Members of the National Home Visiting Network Advisory Committee are engaged in several related efforts. The following (while not comprehensive) represents promising steps forward in supporting home visitors in all regards—their professional well-being as well as their knowledge, skills and practices for providing support to the families they serve.

- [Institute for Home Visiting Workforce Development and the Jackie Walorski Center for Evidence-Based Case Management](#)
- [Supporting and Strengthening the Home Visiting Workforce](#)
- [Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals](#)
- [Start Early's Essentials for Home Visiting](#)
- [Rapid Response Home Visiting](#)

From the clear call for mental health supports for home visitors, to the need to have more program flexibility to meet families' needs, and the deep desire for recognition for the importance of their work, the National Home Visiting Network is humbled to hear the stories of those who do the important work of supporting families. We heard time and again—"I have the best job." "It's a calling for those of us in this field." "I love my work." We owe it to home visitors to listen, have their back, and let their needs guide the field's next steps in home visiting practice, policy, and research.