

# Reframing the terrible twos



*By Victoria Tirrel*

In 1992, the Foundation approached WestEd, a public interest research group in California, to learn about its pioneering efforts in the care of children ages birth to three. WestEd’s exciting work was centered on the idea that high-quality care, based on solid principles of child development and provided in supportive and warm caregiver relationships, would serve as the basis for healthy development of babies and toddlers’ security, confidence and identity in later life.

The Foundation’s focus on infant and toddler caregiver training was a natural outgrowth of its long interest in child development, its confidence in training as a proven strategy, the readiness of the states in the region to develop training systems and the availability of the well-respected WestEd to participate. There was also a need in the region—more women with very young children were entering the workforce and most child care providers had not cared for infants in groups.

The premise that how we care for these youngest humans affects their later competencies also rang true to Jane Kretzmann, senior program officer and shepherd of the Foundation’s infant/toddler training efforts. Since then, she says, the Foundation was been working “to help people realize that the infant/toddler years are an important time in human development. Our efforts have been focused on teaching caregivers to be responsive to infant cues, to create environments that foster healthy development, and to help infants and toddlers trust the world, learn to regulate their emotions and experience discovery; we want them not to be treated like they’re terrible when they go through their twos.”

The efforts are paying off. Three grantees in Minnesota and North and South Dakota have created and sustained culturally sensitive delivery systems for training the caregivers of these youngest humans during a critical time in their brain development.

Early planning grants in 1993 supported one grantee in each state in creating a blueprint for how that state would provide caregiver training. Luckily, grantees knew what tool to use—the Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers (PITC), developed by WestEd, was strong curriculum based on the latest research. With PITC in their pockets, grantees were free to focus on establishing the training delivery system and making it appropriate for the diverse cultures of their states.

From the start, the Foundation believed collaboration with state governments was essential in order to create

programs that could become permanent tools in the repertoire of the states’ child care organizations. That partnership strategy appears to be working. The programs have been active in state-level planning for creating better outcomes for these youngsters. And, Kretzmann said, “already state agencies have supplemented the Bush efforts with other governmental resources, and there is growing movement on the part of some state agencies to absorb the expense of the infant/toddler caregiver training into mainstream budgets.”

Because culture defines so much of human experience, program leaders of the Foundation’s training efforts have adapted the PITC curriculum to encompass a broad array of cultural backgrounds. In Minnesota, for instance, 20 trainers of color provide training in Arabic, Ethiopian, Hmong, Laotian, Somali and Spanish. When working in Native and immigrant cultures, trainers understand that their role often must broaden to include a more social component. And in reservation communities, the training often segues into efforts to improve the structures of how early childhood education occurs.

In 2002, the Foundation developed its Successor program, which aimed at strengthening trainer competencies and moving trainers into consulting and coaching roles. While the original program had focused on descriptive evaluation—what did it take to get the training going—this next phase will look at the impact of the training itself on the quality of care infants and toddlers receive. \*

*The Foundation recently issued a report on the accomplishments of its infant and toddler training program. You can request or download a copy at [www.bushfoundation.org](http://www.bushfoundation.org). To learn more about the PITC curriculum, visit [www.pitc.org](http://www.pitc.org).*

## The Grantees

### **Minnesota Child Care Resource and Referral Network**

7 grants totaling \$3,066,442

### **State of North Dakota, Department of Human Services**

10 grants totaling \$5,155,788

### **State of South Dakota, Department of Social Services**

11 grants totaling \$5,482,514