

HEALTHY FAMILIES OF SOUTHERN WORCESTER COUNTY EXPANDS

Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. is excited to announce the expansion of its Healthy Families of Southern Worcester County program. A federal Massachusetts Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Initiative grant totaling \$305,000 annually for the next three years was awarded through the Department of Public Health (DPH) to expand Healthy Families services to an additional 70 first-time pregnant and parenting families in Southbridge. Healthy Families Massachusetts is a statewide home visiting program available for first-time parents age 20 and under, funded by Children's Trust Fund. Seventeen communities will receive grants through DPH to expand services to first-time parents.

For the first time since its inception in 1998, Healthy Families can now enroll first-time parents of *any age* in Southbridge. Healthy Families provides voluntary, free, and confidential home visits to first-time parents from pregnancy through age three. Families will also be invited to participate in group activities aimed at increasing social connections.

WCAC's Board Chairperson, Deborah Penta, said, "We are thrilled that this Department of Public Health grant opportunity was available to expand the Healthy Families program to additional first-time parents in Southbridge. The program has a great track record of educating families in ways they can positively impact one another and interact with their babies."

To determine the maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting needs of the Commonwealth the Massachusetts Home Visiting Program (MHVP) conducted a statewide needs assessment. The needs assessment identified 17 cities and towns as having the greatest need for home visiting services. High needs were found in the domains of maternal and infant health, child development and school readiness, child maltreatment, violence, and economic self-sufficiency. Southbridge was ranked as ninth in the state for parenting needs. Healthy Families supports first-time mothers and fathers with tools they need to become wonderful parents with children ready to succeed. Healthy Families is currently accepting referrals for families who are pregnant or parenting for the first-time. "We are truly looking to reach all parents who find that they could use an extra hand in learning about their pregnancy and baby for the most critical first three years of life," said Jenn Reed, Program Director.

To qualify, mothers and fathers must be first-time pregnant or parenting families, and can enroll up until their child's first birthday. Healthy Families services are offered at no charge and have no income guidelines. To inquire about home visits or make a referral, please call Healthy Families at 508.909.0061.