

Becca Burse

Even Start Program

I began my internship with the Lincoln Intermediate Unit's Even Start program in New Oxford, Pennsylvania on October 5, 1998. The Even Start Program is designed as a service to assist families, mainly of Hispanic origin, in several different ways. Two goals of the program are parent education and empowerment, as well as helping the children in the family with any problems that they may be having, especially in school. These problems may be academic or social. The duties of my internship were to include going on home visits and doing parent education and empowerment, as well as working with the children in the family on their academic skills. In order to qualify for this program, a family must have a child under the age of 8 years.

From the first day that I went to the LIU office, Margarita, who is in charge of the Even Start program, was extremely helpful and seemed excited that I was there. My welcome there was much different than it had been at ROI. I also noticed that the atmosphere among the employees of the Lincoln Intermediate Unit was much friendlier than that at ROI. Whereas the employees at ROI had offices and were often in there with the doors closed, the employees of LIU have their desks situated around open rooms and chat with one another regularly. Even the employees who have private offices usually have their doors open.

Something that was also very different from ROI at LIU is that every employee that I have met there speaks at least some Spanish, which serves to alleviate many of the communication problems that seemed to arise at ROI. When there are staff meetings among the parent educators at LIU, the meetings are bilingual, and usually end up being conducted primarily in Spanish. One of the main difficulties that I encountered in my work is the fact that I do not speak or understand any Spanish. For that reason, I was more limited in the scope of families with whom I was able to work. It was necessary that at least one parent spoke English, which can be difficult to find when you are working with Hispanic families.

Within the first week of starting my internship with LIU, I was able to get in touch with two families with whom I would soon be working. When I contacted the Pena family of Aspers and the Southerly family of Biglerville, I was met with considerable warmth. The women of each family were extremely open to me coming into their homes and working with their children, which

kind of surprised me. I later found out that they had signed up to receive this type of service and were expecting someone to get in touch with them.

There are such differences between the two families with whom I work, even though they only live a few miles away from one another. The Pena family is from California, where Grace, the mother, grew up. I believe that the father was born in Mexico, as were Grace's parents. They have three children: Lili, who is eleven, Gerry, who is nine, and Ricky, who is six. On the other side of the spectrum is the Southerly family. Inelda is from Panama, which is where she met her husband Michael, who is from Adams County and was in the military down there. They have two children: Inelda, who is seven, and Michael, who is one.

What I actually do is gather material at the LIU office that I bring on my home visits. With the older children, I would usually help them with their homework and then find related materials at LIU in their weakest subjects to bring the following week. With Inelda, I usually helped her with her homework and worked on her reading, which is difficult for her. Ricky and I often worked on writing the alphabet, numbers, and his name. Even though they know that I am there to help them with school work, all four children are extremely receptive to my visits and ask when I am coming back.

Another aspect of my internship was speaking with the parents at each home visit to address any concerns that they may have and I tried to answer their questions. I ended up becoming relatively close with Grace Pena and Inelda Southerly through our conversations during the home visits. Grace would often cook dinner for me, and when I would say, "You're so good to me," she would say that I was also very good to them. It warmed my heart to know that I was helping people who really wanted to be helped.

I also attended the monthly meeting of the parent educators at LIU in October. Many different things were discussed at the meeting, although much of it was not pertinent to me. The topics related mainly to acquiring more grant money and the use of new lap top computers for staff members. This meeting was the first time that I met many of the staff members and everyone was warm and welcoming to me, even though I was an intern and wouldn't be there for any extensive amount of time. Staff members also made it a point to explain to me what was going on when people were speaking Spanish. After the meeting, Margarita told me that she had called both of my families the day before to see how

everything was working out. She told me that both women were thrilled with me and that they were disappointed that I would only be working with them on a temporary basis.

What I was not getting out of my internship at ROI I certainly made up for at my internship with LIU. I feel that I have grown in so many ways as a person. I realize how fortunate I am to have the material things that I have as well as to have had wonderful teachers throughout my schooling at every level. I went into the Mosaic Semester hoping to Aget something out of it.@ I have come to the conclusion that I can do many things that I never before thought possible, and I think that I have also decided what I would like to pursue as a career after I graduate. Through my experiences with all of the different people I have met during this semester, I think that I want to teach children. Before entering this semester, I had no idea what I wanted to do after I graduated, but I think that that knowledge is something that I have taken away from my internship. This has certainly been an experience that I could never replace and I am surprised at how sorry I am to have it coming to a close so soon.