

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill No. 1355  
To Appropriate Funding to The Even Start Program

*group of  
student  
testimony*

The mission of the Even Start Family Literacy Program is to provide educational opportunities for the "most in need and hardest to serve" families in the community. Currently, Even Start Programs are located in six Connecticut communities: Stamford, the lower Naugatuck Valley, New London, Danbury, Windham, and Middletown. The dramatic decrease in federal funding has caused the closing of four Connecticut Even Start programs and has severely impacted services offered in the remaining programs, especially for families of infants and toddlers. Federal funding for 2007-2008 is expected to be at the same level. The President has recommended zero funding for 2008-2009.

Even Start enables parents to increase their own skills and employability and to learn how to become active participants in the education of their children. I ask you to support Bill 1355 to provide funding that will allow the Even Start Program in Connecticut to continue, reinstate and expand as a model in family learning for the state and the country.

We have included many facts and figures about the effectiveness of the Connecticut Even Start Programs and written testimonies from Even Start parents in our package. Now I would like to introduce one of our parents who is here to tell you what the Even Start Program means to her and her daughter.

Cindy Cappetta  
Middletown Even Start Facilitator

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:

*Cindy Cappetta*

Date:

*3/12/07*

Bill Number:

*1355*

## **Testimony on Raised Bill 1355**

Francisca Manson

Middletown Adult education Even Start Program

Hi, my name is Francisca and I am here to explain the reasons why there should be more funding for the Even Start Program. After a year of living with the father of my child and going through difficult times, I moved out and rented a room in my mother's condo. I was also given the chance to go back to school. I am currently in the Adult High School Credit Diploma Program which gives me a chance to earn the rest of my credits through honest work and determination. I have to say, I honestly couldn't have done what I am doing now for my daughter and I, if it weren't for the Even Start Program. This program has given me a chance to do advance in my education and feel completely comfortable knowing that while I learn; my child is not only being watched over but having fun and learning at the same time along with other children her age. This program has a great daily schedule where the kids get to play great learning games, learn to use and read sign language for better communication, learn to share, and learn to use their imaginations. I have no regrets. This program is indeed a blessing and needs to be recognized for its capabilities and the wonderful people you get to meet. This program is also great because it really gives these children a chance to take a big step towards the right direction which is their education. It also gives not only the children, but the mothers of this program, a chance to interact with other babies, children, and adults. This helps to become social, confident, helpful, understanding, and respectful of others. Since I started this program with my daughter, I have seen every child advance mentally including my own. She has learned how to say "please" and "more" in sign language. She is also learning other words like "milk", "sit", and "thank you". She amazes me more and more each day. I've been through a lot to get to where I am with my daughter and I couldn't be happier with the results. The great part about this program is there are wonderful people behind you every step of the way. We need this program and so will mothers and/or fathers of the future. I imagine this program giving lots of parents out there hope for the future of their child or children, and hope for a better life. These are some of my many reasons why there should be funding for the Even Start Program. Thank you.

## Testimony on Raised Bill 1355

My name is Samantha. I am currently attending Middletown Adult Ed. I am a single mother of one. I had a child at a very young age and I thought that I was never going to be able to accomplish my goals of finishing high school and going off to college. That's when I had the opportunity to go to the Middletown Adult Education and become a member and parent of the Even Start Program that they had offered to me.

When I had first entered the program my daughter was 8 months old. It had the biggest impact on her in a very positive way. She had the best teacher any child could have asked for. Mrs. Gale had put all of her time and effort into all of the children. My daughter learned how to say please and thank you on a regular basis, and she also learned how to share because she was not the only child in the classroom. My daughter has benefited a lot from this program. She is doing things that would have taken her a lot longer than it was supposed to take, but thanks to the things Mrs. Gale did with her she has grown into the smartest and brightest little girl that any mother could have asked for. I give credit for this to her teacher Mrs. Gale.

The Even Start Program is the only program that I know that offers early child care to parents starting at the age of 6 weeks and on. This program helps younger mothers out as well as parents from different countries. Parents don't have to wait for their child to be 3 or 4 before anyone will take them and by this time the parents would probably be discouraged and wouldn't even bother with going back. The program also has healthy lunches for all the children and also for the parents. Another great aspect of the program is that they have parenting classes two days out of the week and they have also helped me very much. Many of the parents in the program are young mothers and parents of a different country. It helps the parents to learn things about their children, because with children you can never learn too much. Everyday there is a new experience that you will go through.

My daughter is now 21 months and has moved to the early toddlers' room. Her new teacher is Mrs. Kim and she is the best ever. She does a lot of activities with the children and has a lot of patience with them as well. I have never seen so many 1 year olds that know what they have to do when they come into the classroom. Mrs. Kim has taught them a routine and they know it by heart and I think that that is amazing. You usually can't get a 1 year old to sit down for 2 seconds. They get to paint, dance around the classroom, and they get to play with play dough. Isn't that cool?

I think that the Even Start program is a great program for everyone. There are great opportunities as well. I feel that there should be Even Start programs all over. I think that there should be one in Hartford, New Britain and other places where it could benefit others as well. It doesn't really help if you have to travel. Some people don't have cars and that makes it very hard. If an Even Start was local it would probably help a lot.

Samantha Kamp

**Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 1355  
An Act to Appropriate Money for the Even Start Program**

**My name is Elizabeth Fraser, and I work for the Middletown Even Start Program. Each Even Start program is unique. The programs are set up to meet individual community needs without duplicating existing services. At the last minute Michelle Holovach from Valley Even Start has joined me to present testimony about clients that her program serves.**

# VALLEY EVEN START



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Valley Regional Adult Education  
415 Howe Avenue · Shelton, CT 06484  
Tel: 203-924-6651 ext. 103

Michele Holovach · m.holovach@snet.net  
Website: [www.valleyevenstart.org](http://www.valleyevenstart.org)  
Fax: 203-924-8435

I am Michele Holovach, Director of the Valley Even Start program that serves families in Ansonia, Derby, Seymour, Monroe, and Shelton. Even Start is a family literacy program that provides families most in need with adult education, early childhood education, parenting education, interactive literacy activities, and home visits. Because of job commitments or child care issues, I attended today without a parent but with a story to tell.

Waheeda and her five children fled to Pakistan when Taliban soldiers stormed her house in Afghanistan and took her husband, Ghulam away. In Pakistan, the family applied for refugee status with the US Embassy and settled in Ansonia. Waheeda attended the Valley Even Start program and struggled to learn English because she was never taught to read or write in Afghanistan. Her youngest child, Marwa, attended Head Start and they both spent 20 hours a week learning. The Taliban fell from power and Ghulam was released from a Kandahar prison and eventually joined his family in Ansonia. Three years had passed and Marwa, who was 2 months old when he was taken away, didn't know her father. Because of the Valley Even Start program, this family learned and grew together for three years. Today, Waheeda is speaking English and attending parent conferences at her children's schools. Ghulam acquired his driver's license and has a job to support his family. Their oldest daughter is attending Housatonic Community College

Even Start programs throughout CT have many success stories like this one. So many families have improved their English through English as a Second Language classes, received their high school diploma, attained employment, and improved employment opportunities due to the parent's increased education. These programs are vital so that low-income families can break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the entire families' educational opportunities. The state needs to fund these successful models of family literacy to continue to help our CT families that are most in need and hardest to serve.

309 South Main St.  
Middletown, CT 06457

March 4, 2007

Dear Education Committee Representative:

I am the mother of two girls between the ages of 6 years and 21 months old. My six year old is autistic and currently attending kindergarten. My 21 month old daughter and I are currently attending the Middletown Adult Education Even Start Program. I am working to get my high school diploma. I was unable to obtain a diploma earlier in my life.

Seven years ago I moved to the Middletown area and was introduced to this wonderful program called Even Start by my worker from the shelter. When I started Even Start I was very nervous about math. I was placed in the Adult Basic Education class. I overcame my fear because of the wonderful teachers they have within this program. Given what the program has done for me I am expected to graduate in May 2007. Please allow this program to continue. There are many other women and children who might benefit from Even Start.

Sincerely,

Beverly Ruiz  
Middletown

March 7, 2007

Dear Education Committee Member:

My name is Dorinda Thames. I am an Even Start student attending ABE classes at Middletown Adult Education in Middletown, Connecticut. I have a one year old son, Keshant Thames who is in the toddler class. His teacher's name is Kim Bowker. She has been a very wonderful teacher to my son. She has also taught my son boundaries with his classmates. I am also in the process of graduating from the Adult Basic Skills class and will be going into the External Diploma Program. Within the seven months period of time, I have met some great people in my life. They have given me a second chance of bettering my life. I would like for whoever receives this letter to please give the Even Start Program chances to expand in other parts of Connecticut, so that the mothers that are not able to go to school, can and will get an education like I have.

Thank you for your time,

Dorinda Thames

March 3, 2007

Dear Education Committee Member:

My name is Marsha Bushay and I attend the Middletown, Connecticut Even Start Program. I have a four-month-old baby and his name is Jermaine Gunzell. I am writing this letter to tell you how much this Even Start Program has benefited me. I am in Math and English class and in the next few months, I am positive that I will be moving on to the GED class. I am able to do this because of the Even Start Program.

This program has benefited me by meeting friends and having childcare while I attend school. The Even Start Program provides encouragement for any young lady who has the ability to do things. Even Start teaches babies and older children by giving the moms books to read to their children. I feel good because the childcare provided allows me to attend school without worrying about my son.

The teachers help me care for my son. He is read to every day. We sing songs in class and sometimes make things. The childcare room is very colorful with mirrors and baby toys. It's a happy place. We both like it.

Today I wrote a poem about my son in parenting class:

Jermaine  
Playful and loving  
Likes to smile  
He is so loving  
Darling

The Even Start program teaches us many important things. Please keep funding this program.

Marsha Bushay  
Middletown

March 3, 2007

Dear Education Committee Member:

Today was my first day in the Even Start Program. I am a single mom working towards getting my GED. I am pretty much independent. I attend the program during the day and then work in the afternoons. Once I finish with my GED I can further my education and get a better job. So, if it wasn't for this program, I wouldn't be able to attend school at all. This is really important right now so I can provide a better life for my son in the future.

My son benefits from this program greatly. In his classroom there are many things for him to explore, he is also able to interact with other children. Alongside him are two great teachers. They are constantly doing many activities that help him develop skills for school. For example they read books and sing songs together. Also on Tuesday and Thursday the program provides a lunch. This would be important because it provides a meal for my son and I. It's also time I can enjoy with him along with the other parents. Being a single mom has been challenging but I'm fortunate to have this program available for my son and me.

Sincerely,

Cristina Rodriguez

161 D-3 Cynthia Lane  
Middletown, CT, 06457

Dear Representative Serra,

My name is Samantha. I am currently attending Middletown Adult Ed. I am a single mother of one. I had a child at a very young age and I thought that I was never going to be able to accomplish my goals of finishing high school and going off to college. That's when I had the opportunity to go to the Middletown Adult Education and become a member and parent of the Even Start Program that they had offered to me.

When I had first entered the program my daughter was 8 months old. It had the biggest impact on her in a very positive way. She had the best teacher any child could have asked for. Mrs. Gale had put all of her time and effort into all of the children. My daughter learned how to say please and thank you on a regular basis, and she also learned how to share because she was not the only child in the classroom. My daughter has benefited a lot from this program. She is doing things that would have taken her a lot longer than it was supposed to take, but thanks to the things Mrs. Gale did with her she has grown into the smartest and brightest little girl that any mother could have asked for. I give credit for this to her teacher Mrs. Gale.

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My daughter is now 21 months and has moved to the early toddlers' room. Her new teacher is Mrs. Kim and she is the best ever. She does a lot of activities with the children and has a lot of patience with them as well. I have never seen so many 1 year olds that know what they have to do when they come into the classroom. Mrs. Kim has taught them a routine and they know it by heart and I think that that is amazing. You usually can't get a 1 year old to sit down for 2 seconds. They get to paint, dance around the classroom, and they get to play with play dough. Isn't that cool?

I think that the Even Start program is a great program for everyone. There are great opportunities as well. I feel that there should be Even Start programs all over. I think that there should be one in Hartford, New Britain and other places where it could benefit others as well. It doesn't really help if you have to travel. Some people don't have cars and that makes it very hard. If an Even Start was local it would probably help a lot.

Samantha Kamp

March 8, 2007

Dear Education Committee Member:

I am a 29 year old woman who is a student at Middletown Adult Education. I have five children ages from 2 to 11. I am here because I need my high school diploma. If there wasn't any childcare, I wouldn't be able to go to school to get my diploma.

This is a really good program to go to school for. When my daughter first got here she would not talk that much. Now that she's been here for 5 months she talks a lot better because the teachers taught me how to show her to use her words. The program has taught my daughter her ABC'S and they also taught her how to use sign language and that has helped her to talk more. They also taught me that it is very important to read to my children daily.

Now that they cut the program, we don't have as many field trips. I don't have a car to take my children places and I don't get to do a lot of things as a family with my children. They also have a cooked meal for the Even Start program.

I have been working very hard in the External Diploma Program so that I will graduate this May. It is very important for me to get my diploma this May so I can go to college next fall. It is also very important so my children see that I graduate so they don't make the same mistake I made in dropping out of school. I hope they continue to fund the Even Start Program in Middletown. They also should support Even Start Programs in other cities. I hope they can continue funding for the Even Start Program so the parents have childcare so they can get their education.

Sincerely,

Michelle Gage  
Middletown Parent of 5

Even Start

Sandy Velez

1 School Ridge Rd

Danbury CT. 06810

March 8, 2007

To whom I may concern

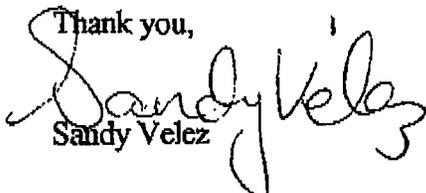
My name is Sandy Velez and I am 20 years old. I have 3 children, two sons ages 4 and 2 years old, and a daughter 4 months old. I got pregnant with my first child when I was 15 years old and I am a single parent.

When I was attending Danbury High school I decided to drop out because people would make fun of me and I had a hard time getting along with people. When I found out about Danbury Even Start it was a second chance for mothers to complete their high school education and get a good job. I have been enrolled in the Even Start program since June 19, 2006.

This program helps me to be a better parent. When I am in the classroom doing my work, my children are in their own classroom down the hall learning with other children. I have never seen this kind of program which helps mothers to be better parents while teaching children to share with others.

I plan to graduate this June 2007 and become a lab technician so that I can provide a good future for my children. Without this program I could not accomplish my goal of graduating and providing an education for my children.

Thank you,

  
Sandy Velez

Even Start  
1 School Ridge rd.  
Danbury CT.06810  
Solmary Negron  
October 20,2006

To whom it may concern:

My name is Solmary Negron. I am 17 years old. I have a 8 month old daughter named Jonari. I left high school when I was 5 month pregnant. Because I didn't feel like beeing in a school were every body was going to look at me wrong.

I had a hard life before I had my daughter and still. But if I didn't fall before I am not going to fall now. When I was pregnant I didn't know what to do . I thought I didn't have any where to go. But thanks to my mom she found out about this program called Evenstart.

At a wic appointment. A paper was posted on the wall. It said this is a program for young mothers trying to get a high school diploma. My life got better when I started to go to Even Start .I had people that supported me and they helped me with any thing I needed.

And I am a first time mother and I didn't now many things. But my parenting teacher also my home visitor help me a lot. This program is like a family I never had. And if it wasn't for this program I don't know where would I be or my daughter. I thank god all the time for this program .

It has helped me a lot and made me open my eyes. I am not just learning how to be a better mother I am also learning subjects that I never did when I was in high school and never payed attention. In high school I always skiped classes to be with my friends. I regret it .But am happy that even start is here because it helped me change my life .

And now I am also a responsible person Even start was a blessing to my life. I am a single mother and its hard for me. But this program helps a lot. I can just hope that this program is still here for other girls that are going through the same.

Sincerely,  
Solmary Negron

**Even Start****Vanessa Torres****1 School Ridge Rd.****Danbury CT 06811**

To whom this may concern,

My name is Vanessa Torres, I am 18 years old, and I have a 4-month-old son. I have been enrolled in the Danbury Even Start program since April 24, 2006. I came here to complete high school and to get my high school diploma. When I first came to Even Start, I was 7 months pregnant. My son was born on June 9, 2006. I am currently attending school and working at an assisting living. My goal is to finish high school by December.

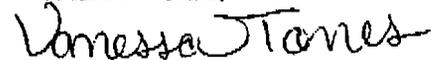
The reason why I stopped attending high school was that I was given the opportunity to attend Even Start and get my high school diploma while having a baby. I left high school when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I feel that coming to this program was a lot better for me because while I was in high school it was very hard to try to finish high school because you have people staring at you and teachers looking at you in a wrong way. Just because you are young and pregnant. In Even Start all the girls are in the same situation and it makes you feel welcomed and comfortable. It is a place where you do not have to worry about what people think about you. I think that Even Start is a good program for all pregnant and teen mothers.

This program is important to me because I feel that this is a place where young mothers can accomplish their goals and finish high school. I know that a lot of young mothers think that they will not be able to do it, but this program has so much to offer. They give you the education that you need and they also provide a daycare for your kids while you are in class. The classes we get are English, Math, and History. We get to work on the computer and we also have a parenting class. In parenting class, we learn a lot about how to care for our kids and if there are any questions that concern us, we just ask the teacher who is a specialist in caring for kids and she answers all of our questions. In high school,

we would not be able to do that. Also the Even start program provides us with an early childhood learning center for our kids, with breakfast and lunch. Another thing that is good about this program is that they provide us with bus transportation. I have never seen or heard about a program that is like the Even Start program. That is why I feel that this program should stay around because it is really helping teen mothers finish school and get their high school diploma. I feel that this program has benefited me a lot, because without this program, I would not be getting my high school diploma, and I would have been just another high school drop out. This is why I believe that the Even Start program should stay around for a long time, to help teen and pregnant mothers so that we can also get an education and have better jobs to support our kids.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Torres



## **FAST FACTS ABOUT CONNECTICUT EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY FY 2006**

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-  86% of the families are on poverty level; about 15% come to Even Start Family Literacy from shelters
-  20% of the parents have less than an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education.
-  The Connecticut Even Start Family Literacy program has an accountability and quality assurance program in place that includes Performance Indicators (expected standards of achievement) in Adult Education, Early Childhood Education, and Parenting Education. These standards include attendance and outcomes and are evaluated annually.
-  Statewide, 86% of the required statewide performance indicators were met in FY 2006.
-  60% of our GED and High School Diploma adults attained their diplomas in FY 2006.
-  Our ABE and ESL adults make statistically significant gains in reading, math, and listening on standardized tests (CASAS) each semester
-  71% of the adults make significant gains in family literacy skills
-  75% of the preschool children (3-5 years) show progress or mastery on cognition, language and writing skills
-  100% of the programs have been accredited or in the process of renewing accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). 93% of our children are attending preschool for the first time.
-  Cost per family on average is about \$8,500.00 to deliver quality literacy services to adults and children who are most in need and hardest to serve.