

# POLICY BRIEF



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## ➤ Reach Up: An Early Childhood Parenting Programme

### The case for improved Early Childhood Development

All children deserve the best start in life. Yet over 200 million children in low and middle income countries fail to reach their developmental potential (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). Poverty, malnutrition, exposure to violence, and little to no opportunities for learning are just some of the factors which can hinder a child's ability to realise his full capabilities.

The very first years of a child's life are crucial. How children develop in these early years affects how well they do for the rest of their lives – it affects their success at school, how they behave and relate to other people and even their success as an adult.

Investments and experiences during this period create the foundations for lifetime success (Heckman JJ, 2006).



REACH UP AND LEARN

### The Formative Years: Play and Interaction are Key to Child Development

A child's early years are the most important in setting the foundation for life. One reason the early years are so important is that during this period the brain is developing at its most rapid rate. What happens to children in this period, especially how adults interact with them, affects how their brains develop and sets the stage for future physical, emotional and mental development (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

Studies across a number of countries have shown that young children who do not benefit from quality interaction with an adult are behind in their cognitive and language skills when they reach school age, and may never catch up. This contributes to poor school achievement and lower earning potential over that child's life span. Several parenting initiatives are therefore focused on preventative approaches.

***It is much easier to mitigate and prevent underdevelopment in a child's earliest years rather than at any later stage.***

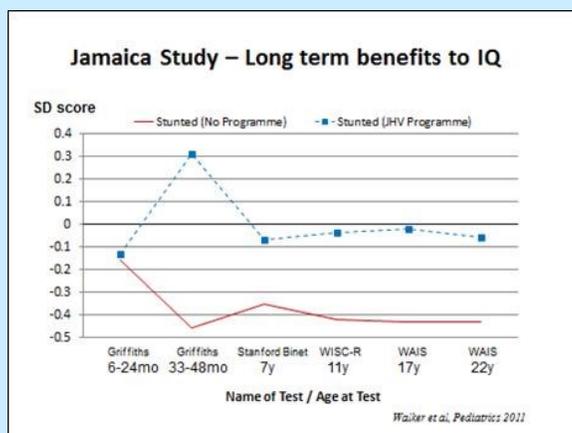


“The JHV programme has been replicated in other low resource settings such as Bangladesh, Colombia, Peru and India...”

## The Jamaica Home Visit Programme



The Jamaica Home Visit (JHV) programme introduced an approach delivered by community workers to show parents simple and inexpensive ways of interacting with their young children using homemade toys, books, and conversation. In 1986, an evaluation of the effects of nutritional supplementation and psychosocial stimulation (JHV) on the growth and development of stunted children was conducted at the University of the West Indies. The children benefited from both types of intervention, the effects of which were additive (Grantham-McGregor et al, 1991). A 20-year follow-up of stunted children who participated in the JHV programme, demonstrated benefits throughout childhood to development and IQ and dramatic benefits later in life. The children who benefited from the JHV programmes did better in school, were happier, and as adults had higher IQs, better mental health, demonstrated less violent behaviour and earned more money than similar children who did not receive the programme. The graph below demonstrates the long term benefits of the intervention.



The JHV programme has been replicated in other low resource settings such as Bangladesh, Colombia, Peru and India and has shown substantial evidence of benefits to child development.



More on the Jamaica Home Visit Programme at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sief-trust-fund/brief/the-power-of-play>

## Addressing the Worldwide need for Effective Parenting Programmes

Despite the compelling evidence to support investing in the early years, there is a global lack of expertise in how best to provide support for parents and their children in these early years. There is a critical need to improve home environments, provide evidence-based parenting programmes and ensure children have interactive care givers and opportunities to learn.

The UNICEF and WHO Directors have called for greater efforts to put science into practice for young children through early effective interventions (Lake and Chan, 2015)



## Reach Up: An Early Childhood Parenting Programme

The Reach Up Early Childhood Parenting Programme has been designed to provide the materials and training needed to implement effective parenting interventions. It is based on the proven Jamaica Home Visit Programme and was designed by a team\* that has successfully implemented the approach in several countries.

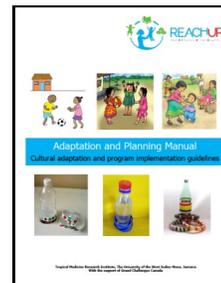
This programme is unique due to its extensive evidence base. It has been formulated with the benefit of over 30 years' worth of research on effective early childhood intervention programmes.

It provides agencies with a comprehensive set of materials to support parents in providing a more stimulating environment for their children, improving quality interaction and facilitating learning.



The materials from the Reach Up parenting programme are available via [www.reachupandlearn.com](http://www.reachupandlearn.com) in an easy to use download ready format. Materials include:

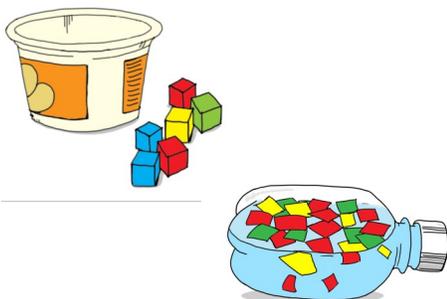
- A weekly curriculum for children 6-42 months old, which can be modified to a fortnightly format. This curriculum includes detailed descriptions of how to use the materials during the home visit using developmentally appropriate concepts.
- The training manual with demonstration videos assists agencies in the training of the home visitors utilizing an interactive format. The videos were filmed in Jamaica, Peru and Bangladesh.
- The toy manual is a useful tool as it guides the agencies on how to make toys using recyclable materials.
- The supervisor manual gives guidelines on the responsibilities of the supervisor and appropriate observation of the home visits.




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- The adaptation and planning manual which is included in the package can assist agencies to adapt the programme to their cultural context. This manual describes the steps that can be taken and the requirements for setting up a programme in a country.



**\*Reach Up Team:**

**S Walker, C Powell, S Chang-Lopez, H Baker-Henningham, J Smith, K Fernandez and A Wright** Caribbean Institute for Health Research, The University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

**S Grantham-McGregor,** Emeritus Professor, University College London and The University of The West Indies.

**J Hamadani,** International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh

## Recommendations

- 1. Evidence based parenting programmes are an essential investment for life course development:** The Jamaica Home Visit programme results indicated that benefits became more wide-ranging over time. At 22 years these included cognitive, social, educational and mental health benefits, and increased wages (Walker et al., 2011; Gertler et al., 2014 ).
- 2. Parenting Programmes should be culturally relevant:** In implementing the Reach Up module, stakeholders are encouraged to adapt the curriculum to new cultures for best outcomes. Adapting the curriculum requires knowledge of childrearing practices and beliefs and identifying local songs, games and play materials to be incorporated into the curriculum.
- 3. There should be continued advocacy at the local, national and global levels:** To ensure that children’s development receives the attention it deserves beginning from birth, continuous advocacy is required at all levels to encourage senior policymakers to implement policies that ensure all children can reach their full potential.

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[info@reachupandlearn.com](mailto:info@reachupandlearn.com)



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