



PROFILE

Sheila McKenna

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NOEMI RODRIGUEZ

Coordinator of the Brooklyn (Region 8) site of The Parent-Child Home Program, which is based at PS 32 in Carroll Gardens and goes into various schools in Brooklyn. The national program is committed to helping families challenged by poverty, low levels of education, language barriers and other obstacles to educational success.

BIOGRAPHY

49; native of Puerto Rico, moved to Brooklyn when she was 3 years old. Received a bachelor's degree from Brooklyn College and a master's in early childhood education from Adelphi University. Has worked for the Department of Education for 16 years and is now an early childhood specialist, teaching prekindergarten at PS131 in Borough Park. Married, two children, lives on Staten Island.

FOCUS

"We received a special grant for this program three years ago. My superintendent at the time thought it was a really good idea to try this kind of early intervention and, since I work prekindergarten, thought it was the best place to start. What makes it special is that it is a home-based program and it lasts for two years. We seek out the families in the homes and it's very private. Our workers go in twice a week for 30 minutes a session and emphasize the verbal interaction between child and parent. We help the parents to realize their roles as the most important teacher in a child's life. What we try to do is enrich their vocabulary and all their verbal interaction so that when they start school, these children are ready and prepared."

COMMITMENT

"I just love to strengthen families. I wanted to build a bridge between the home and the school and this program is the perfect way to do it. Once the students enter school, they already have a connection and made a friend - because most of our workers come from the school setting. They build a relationship that is critical. Also, what we've found is that a lot of the parents we chose did not finish high school and this is way to encourage them to complete their own education and get their GED."

LOOKING AHEAD

"It's our desire to really spread The Parent-Child Program out into other parts of Brooklyn. Now we service Sunset Park, Red Hook, Boerum Hill, and we would like to go into Crown Heights, Bushwick and beyond."

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