Reasons for Interest in Early Childhood Development

- Importance of early experience on healthy development, readiness to learn, socio-emotional well-being

- Epidemiological evidence has shown that 15-20% of children aged 4-16 suffer from one or more mental health problems

- But few children with mental health problems receive treatment from social or mental health services – 17% according to the Ontario Child Health Study
The Importance of Prevention

George Albee (1990)

“No mass disease or disorder afflicting humankind has ever been eliminated by attempts at treating individuals. . . Primary prevention is an approach to reducing the future incidence of a condition through proactive efforts aimed at groups, or even a whole society.”
Better Beginnings, Better Futures

Purpose:

A 25-year longitudinal prevention policy research demonstration project to provide information on the effectiveness of prevention as a policy for children in Ontario, Canada
Program Model

Ecological, Comprehensive, Holistic Programs

- Programs for children, parents, families, schools, and neighbourhoods and a focus on the whole child – physical, social, behavioral, emotional, cognitive

Community Involvement in Programs

- Parents and other citizens participate as equal partners with schools and service-providers in planning, designing and carrying out programs
Program Model

**Universal High Quality Programs**
- Programs universally available to all children in certain age ranges in the selected communities for 4 years

**Integrated Programs**
- Strong partnerships among service organizations and providers
Goals

Prevention
- To reduce the incidence of serious, long-term emotional and behavioural problems in children living in high risk neighborhoods

Promotion
- To promote the optimal development in children

Community Development
- To strengthen the ability of disadvantaged communities to respond effectively to the needs of children and their families
Better Beginnings
Communities

8 economically disadvantaged communities in Ontario

2 age groups
- 5 younger child communities (birth to 4 years of age)
- 3 older child communities (4 to 8 years of age) – all of the older child sites had school, family, and community programs
Older Child Communities

Cornwall: 4 Francophone primary schools
- 530 children

Etobicoke: Highfield Junior School
- 517 children

Sudbury: 6 primary schools in Flour Mill / le Moulin à Fleur and Donovan neighborhoods
- 503 children
In-school Programs for Children

- Half-day Junior Kindergarten at age 4 and Senior Kindergarten at age 5
- Educational assistants
- Nutrition programs
- School-wide Lion’s Quest social skills program
- Summer programs for children
Enrichment workers provided individual and group support to these children continuously from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 2

- lowered the adult-to-student ratio in the classroom
- provided assistance with language, self-help and social skills
- provided summer enrichment activities
LAURA'S QUESTIONS

WHAT COLOUR IS...

WHAT'S IT FEEL LIKE...

DID YOU FEEL THE BOTTOM...

WHAT'S THE BOTTOM FEEL...

AND THE TOP IS WHAT...

AND WHAT OTHER COLOUR ...

MIX?

AND WHAT COLOUR DID...

WRITE THE QUESTIONS APPROPRIATE...

THE QUESTIONS ENCOURAGED...

TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION...
Parent and Family Support Programs

- Parent support groups and parenting workshops
- Home visitation
- Family Resource Centre programs
- Toy lending library
- English as second language
Community Development Programs

- Community leadership development
- Special community events and celebrations
- Promotion of respect for ethnocultural diversity
- Before and after school programs and during holidays
- Community gardens and co-op food purchasing
- Family movie night
Research

- Qualitative research on program development and the program model – data collected by site researchers through participant observation and interviews

- Quantitative research on short-term, medium-term, and long-term effects of the programs and their costs
Partnerships with Schools and other Agencies

- All sites established partnerships with primary schools and other agencies

- “I think as time went by, everybody just started understanding and trusting the people around, they built up relationships of closeness...Before the teachers would pass by the gym and something would be going on and they would just pass by. Now we don’t have to invite them, they just drop in” (Project staff member)
Main Findings regarding Resident Participation and Empowerment

- Participation - residents participate actively in a variety of ways in the project
- Empowered - positive outcomes on residents, programs, and the community
- Empowering –the way the projects operated facilitated empowerment outcomes
“... the first time I sat on (the Steering Committee), I didn't say anything because I was scared if I said anything it might come out wrong... I was so scared they would laugh at me...” (Community resident)
Outcomes

- Followed up Better Beginnings children and children in comparison communities at JK, SK, grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, and (currently) 12
- Gathered information from children, parents, teachers, school records
- More than 700 families in the follow-up research
Significant positive impacts on teacher ratings and parent ratings of youth behaviour problems and prosocial behaviour at grades 2, 3, 6, & 9

Significant reductions in youth placed in special education and improvements in preparedness for school, adaptive functioning in school, and repeated grades as reported by teachers in grade 9
Research Findings - Outcomes

Teacher Rated Hyperactivity-Inattention Scale, Grade 9

Adjusted means

Cornwall: 4.40
Sudbury: 4.30
Ottawa-Vanier: 6.28
Highfield: 4.32
Etobicoke: 5.08
Better Beginnings Sites: 4.33
Comparison Sites: 5.68

7-item scale; higher scores mean more hyperactive; range of total score: 0 – 14.
Research Findings - Outcomes

- Positive impacts on parents’ reports of their social support, family functioning, and marital satisfaction at grades 2, 3, 6, & 9

- Significant positive impacts on parent reports of school at Highfield site in grades 2, 3, and 6 – improved ratings of school and positive relationship with teacher

- Significant positive impacts on parent reports of community – improved ratings of housing, neighborhood satisfaction and neighborhood cohesion in grades 2, 3, 6 & 9
Outcomes

- What are the long-term effects and cost-benefits for children and their families
- Using a narrative approach, how do the stories of those who participated in Better Beginnings differ from those youth in comparison communities
Costs

What are the annual costs of these programs?

- We will calculate cost savings associated with outcome differences between Better Beginnings project and comparison children in follow-up research.

- We already know that the costs of this program are far less than those for other prevention programs in the U.S.
# Better Beginnings Program Costs Compared to Other Prevention Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Costs in 2003 Cdn $ per Child per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better Beginnings, Better Futures (1997 Cdn$)</td>
<td>$1,130 X 1.15 CPI = $1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abecedarian Project (2003 US$)</td>
<td>$8,574 X 1.54 = $13,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry Preschool Project (2003 US$)</td>
<td>$7,415 X 1.54 = $7,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Child-Parent Centers (2003 US$)</td>
<td>$3,456 X 1.54 = $5,322</td>
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</tbody>
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**NOTE:** One U.S. dollar worth $1.54 Cdn in 2003.

Conclusions

- Participatory and empowering processes with community residents were developed and sustained in neighborhoods that typically distrust government and service agencies.

- Universal, ecological prevention programs were developed in partnership with residents, schools and community agencies.

- Positive impacts of Better Beginnings have been found on children, families, parents, and communities.
PARTNERSHIPS FOR PREVENTION
THE STORY OF THE HIGHFIELD COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT PROJECT
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Gracias!
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