

**Better Beginnings, Better Futures:  
A Comprehensive, Community-Based  
Prevention Program to Facilitate Successful  
Transition to Primary School and Beyond**

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**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.



**GOALS**

*Prevention*

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

*Promotion*

- To promote the optimal social, emotional, behavioural, physical and educational development in children.

*Community Development*

- To strengthen the ability of disadvantaged communities to respond effectively to the social and economic needs of children and their families.



**PROGRAM MODEL**

*High Quality Programs*

- For children and families from conception to age 4 or from ages 4 to 8.

*Integrated Programs*

- Health and social service providers "blend and unite."

*Community Involvement*

- Parents and local citizens participate as equal partners with service-providers in planning, designing and carrying out programs in the neighbourhood.



**NEIGHBOURHOODS/  
COMMUNITIES**

83% of families in younger child sites, and 64% in the older child sites were below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut Offs in 1992-93.

37% of families were led by lone parents.



<u>Younger Child Sites (0 - 4 yrs)</u>	<u>Older Child Sites (4 - 8yrs)</u>
<u>Guelph:</u> Willow Road ▪ 500 children	<u>Cornwall:</u> 4 Francophone primary schools ▪ 530 children
<u>Kingston:</u> Northern Area ▪ 876 children	<u>Etobicoke:</u> Highfield Junior School ▪ 517 children
<u>Ottawa:</u> Albion-Heatherington ▪ 552 children	<u>Sudbury:</u> Flour Mill / le Moulin à Fleur and Donovan ▪ 503 children
<u>Toronto:</u> Regent Park ▪ 900 children	
<u>Walpole Island First Nation:</u> ▪ 200 children	

## BOTTOM-UP PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT APPROACH



Each community to undertake as many high quality programs as possible, which could be expected to produce positive child development outcomes, within the limits of available resources and local needs.

*Experimenter-controlled uniform treatment administration insures that we know precisely the nature of the treatment documented to work by the evaluation.*



*BUT it prohibits tailoring treatment to the individual needs of participants, which is a major "best practice" of service delivery.*

McCall & Green (2004) *Beyond the Methodological Gold Standards of Behavioral Research: Considerations for Practice and Policy*. SRCD Social Policy Report.  
www.srzd.org

## BETTER BEGINNINGS PROGRAMS COMMON TO EACH SITE

Program Type	Program Description
Child-Focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-class and in-school programs</li> <li>Child care enhancements</li> <li>Before and after-school activities</li> <li>School "breakfast club"</li> <li>Recreation programs</li> </ul>
Parent-Focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home visitors</li> <li>Parent support groups</li> <li>Parenting workshops</li> <li>One-on-one support</li> <li>Child care for parent relief</li> </ul>
Family- and Community Focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community leadership development</li> <li>Special community events and celebrations</li> <li>Safety initiatives in the neighborhood</li> <li>Community field trips</li> <li>Adult education</li> <li>Family camps</li> <li>Outreach to families</li> </ul>

## PROGRAMS OFFERED



Average = 16  
Range = 12-19

Larry Schweinhart, Director of the Perry Preschool Program, calls the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project a "Meta Program" or "Strategy".

## RESEARCH DESIGN



In 1993-94, a longitudinal research sample of 411 four-year old children in Junior Kindergarten and their families was recruited in the 3 Better Beginnings sites and in 2 demographically matched Comparison sites.

Child, family and neighbourhood measures were collected repeatedly on these children/ families for the next 9 years: 1993-1998 (JK – Grade 3), 2001-2002 (Grade 6), 2004-2005 (Grade 9).

## TWO WAVES OF LONGITUDINAL FOLLOW-UP DATA



- First wave collected in 2001-2002 when children in Grade 6.
- Second wave collected in 2004-2005 when children in Grade 9.

### WHAT WE FOUND AT GRADE 9



#### Youth Behaviour

##### Academic functioning and school behaviour

Teachers rated Better Beginnings youth:

- as being better prepared for school
- using fewer special education services
- showing more adaptive functioning in school, and
- being likely to go further in school

Also, Better Beginnings youth repeated fewer grades by grade 9 than youth from the comparison sites.

The strongest Grade 9 positive outcomes occurred in school.

### WHAT WE FOUND AT GRADE 9



#### Youth Behaviour

##### Ability to get along with others

Better Beginnings parents viewed their child's conflict resolution skills and number of people important to the child more positively than parents of children from the comparison sites.

However, youth saw themselves as getting along with their friends less easily than did youth from the comparison sites.

### WHAT WE FOUND AT GRADE 9



#### Youth Behaviour

##### Behavioural and emotional problems

Teachers rated Better Beginnings youth as displaying

- fewer emotional problems and
- fewer hyperactive/inattentive behaviours in the classroom.

However, Better Beginnings youth rated themselves as

- having more emotional problems and
- lower self-esteem

### WHAT WE FOUND AT GRADE 9



#### Parents

Parents from the Better Beginnings neighbourhoods:

- were more satisfied with their marital relationships
- reported more positive family functioning and
- reported more social support

We did not find any indication of positive impacts on parenting. Perhaps comprehensive community initiatives could adopt and tailor more well-established parenting programs to suit their particular contexts.

### WHAT WE FOUND AT GRADE 9



#### Neighbourhood

Parents from the Better Beginnings neighbourhoods were more satisfied with their local neighbourhood as a place to live.

### WHAT WE FOUND AT GRADE 9



#### Cost-Savings Analyses

- it cost the Ontario government about \$2966 per child to provide up to four years of Better Beginnings programming
- we conducted a cost savings analysis using 12 measures that could be assigned a dollar value and that cost the government money

Types of Services Tracked	Did Better Beginnings result in cost savings to government?
<b>Health Care and Social Services</b>	
Visits to a family physician	Yes
Hospital emergency room use	No
Number of serious injuries	No
Number of overnight stays in hospital	No
Visits with nurse practitioner	No
Family involvement with Children's Aid Society	No
<b>Remedial Education</b>	
Grade repetition	Yes
Use of special education services	Yes
<b>Criminal Justice System</b>	
Arrests	Yes
Court appearances	No
<b>Welfare/Disability Programs</b>	
Social Welfare Assistance	Yes
Ontario Disability Support Program	Yes

### Cost-Savings Analyses



- The overall cost per child for the 12 services was \$3,902 less for the Better Beginnings youth and their families than it was for youth and families from the comparison sites.
- Therefore, the savings gained in the 12 public/government agencies of \$3,902 per child more than covers the \$2,966 cost per child amount for Better Beginnings programs.
- Preliminary results from the cost saving analyses of nearly \$1000 per child are encouraging.

To obtain such significant cost-saving results as early as grade 9 is exciting news, as most prevention programs do not show cost savings until kids are older; for instance, in access to higher education, higher income and in terms of fewer arrests.

### NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH



- In fall 2007, our research team was awarded a three year grant from Public Safety Canada's National Crime Prevention Centre
- We have gathered data from youth (age 18 years) and their families in the 3 Better Beginnings older cohort sites and their 2 comparison sites. Data collection was completed in October 2008.
- Results will be ready in the Spring 2010.

If positive school and academic outcomes continue, this bodes well for more high school graduation, fewer high school dropouts and economic effectiveness of the Better Beginnings Project.

Better Beginnings programs may have increased children's critical evaluation of themselves despite better school outcomes.