

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



Contacts: Julia Ann Easley
WLU Information Officer
(519) 884-1970 ext. 2070

Dr. Ken Banks
Professor of Social Work
(519) 884-1970 ext. 2033

Sept. 1, 1992
44-1992

Cambridge families sought to participate in WLU research project

Cambridge, Ont. (Sept. 1) — About 100 families in Cambridge will have the opportunity to play a role toward improving the support networks in their community and in others.

Three professors of social work at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo will invite a Cambridge neighborhood to participate in a three-year research project to identify formal and informal support networks for families and ways they can become more responsive to community needs.

The project, called "The Company of Neighbours," is being funded by a \$235,000 grant from the Donner Canadian Foundation. It was announced today at a news conference at the Allan Reuter Centre in Cambridge.

Ken Banks, who will carry out the project with co-researchers Edcil Wickham and Robert Basso, says that traditionally, research and development in the social welfare field has not recognized that family members and community residents can best identify their own needs and marshal the resources to address them.

"We must find better ways to enable families struggling with life's problems to cope, overcome, and even avoid some of them," Banks says.

"Especially during the recession, families are encountering a number of difficulties in their daily lives such as layoffs, financial problems, marital and child-rearing conflicts, and substance abuse," he adds.

(MORE)

"Many families are unaware of the range of assistance available to them and even if they do know what's out there, seeking the help can often be demeaning or, at the least, frustrating."

Banks says Cambridge was chosen as the site for the project because of its rich ethnic composition, its mix of middle- and low-income earners, and its range of housing types.

Once the specific neighborhood has been selected, researchers will ask families to talk about their experiences with support networks. Soliciting the community's views and suggestions will take about a year.

In the second phase of the project, the researchers will work with community members to evaluate supports and then establish services and programs that address the concerns identified.

"We hope this project can help the community to be more aware of its collective strengths and resources, and to use them to its advantage," says Wickham.

What is learned from the demonstration phase of the project will be useful for building and teaching social work theory, and the practice of the profession, Banks says.

The researchers say the liberal funding guidelines of the Donner Canadian Foundation will allow them the latitude to explore residents' perspectives on community issues rather than prejudging the results.

"For the most part, the changing needs of the family and community are being overlooked by both researchers and those that might fund them," says Robert Couchman, president of the foundation. "The foundation wants to do what it can to promote research and demonstration projects in these important areas."

The grant to the Laurier project is one of two catalytic grants to be awarded this year by the foundation in its newly created Vital Family and Community Life category.

Established in Toronto 26 years ago, the Donner Canadian Foundation is a national private foundation. It awards \$2.3 million a year for projects exploring Canada and its international relations; the relationship between the environment and the economy; and, now, the family and community life.