

NEWS RELEASE



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Study finds early intervention essential to success for at-risk children

WATERLOO – Children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to succeed if they participate in a community-based prevention program, according to a study conducted by researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University and Queen’s University.

The recently released findings come from the Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF) project, a multi-year research study that began in 1991. The project is based at Queen’s University and research was conducted in collaboration with Laurier Community Psychology Professors Geoff Nelson, Mark Pancer and Colleen Loomis.

The BBBF study is the most ambitious research project of its kind in Canada. More than 600 children between four and eight years old and their families participated in the study, as well as 358 children and their families from sociodemographically-matched comparison communities. Extensive follow-up data were collected when the children were in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12.

The researchers found participating children performed better socially and academically in Grades 6 and 9 and had fewer emotional and behavioural problems in school. In Grade 12, study results continued to show positive effects on school functioning. BBBF children were less likely to have committed property offences while parents from BBBF sites reported greater feelings of social support and had more positive ratings of marital satisfaction and general family functioning. Positive neighborhood-level effects were also evident.

Not only did children participating in the BBBF project show improved social and academic functioning, but the project also impacted positively on families and neighbourhoods.

“A key element in the success of Better Beginnings was the involvement of community residents in every aspect of project development,” said Pancer. “They participated in selecting the programs to be offered in their communities, hiring project staff, and serving on boards and committees, among many other things. The project would not have succeeded as well without the contribution of community members.”

Economic analyses showed BBBF participation was associated with significant government savings per child.

“The results from our study indicate that the project has been a success,” said Ray Peters, psychology professor emeritus at Queen’s University and the lead researcher on the study. “The project was designed to prevent young children in low-income, high-risk neighbourhoods from experiencing poor developmental outcomes, and to decrease the use of expensive health, education and social services. The study has proven that goal to be attainable.”

The research was funded by the Government of Ontario, Ontario Mental Health Foundation, National Crime Prevention Centre and Public Safety Canada. For more information, visit <http://bbbf.queensu.ca>.