

Better Beginnings, Better Futures: Partnerships with Service-providers and Parents



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Principal Sources of Information for Program Development, Program Model



- Long-term immersion of site researchers in the project sites (1991-1998), sustainability study (2003-2004)
- Extensive field notes (descriptive and analytic)
- Individual and focus group interviews
- Project documents
- All qualitative data

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Partnerships with Schools and other Agencies



- One of the key elements of Better Beginnings was "Integration"; this meant, in part, collaborating with other organizations & agencies in the community to provide comprehensive prevention programming & avoid duplication of programs
- Service providers at various levels, from a range of community organizations, were invited to participate in key project committees, particularly the board of directors or main steering committee of the projects

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Partners



- Schools
- Children's Aid Societies
- Public Health Department
- Community Health Centre
- Public Housing
- Neighbourhood Organizations
- Multi-cultural, Ethnic Organizations
- Community Advocacy Organizations
- Child & Family Centres
- Childcare services
- Children's Mental Health

Nature of Involvement



- Participation in planning, decision-making & policy development related to programs
- Participation in direct services of the project
- Provide access to resources & services
- Provide skills & expertise
- Advocacy for the project

Factors Facilitating Service Provider Involvement



- Administrative support
- Release time & resources for training
- Personal motivation of service providers
- The project as a vehicle for reaching out to the community
- Shared goals & vision
- Reciprocation in helping
- Project champions

Obstacles/Barriers to Service Provider Involvement



- Lack of clear understanding of service integration
- Funding cutbacks
- Different philosophies
- Balance of service providers & community residents
- Staff changes in partner organization

Outcomes of Partnerships with Service Providers



- Enriched existing programs by providing Better Beginnings resources or personnel
- New programs created collaboratively
- Partners contributions enhance Better Beginnings programs
- More advocacy power
- Enrichment of Better Beginnings programs by providing space, resources, equipment
- More effective program administration

“The conception and realization of [the summer recreation] program required the active participation of the Better Beginnings family resource centre, the separate school board and the municipal leisure services. The latter brings expertise in coordinating recreational activities. The family resource centre furnishes material as well as supervision of daily activities and staff. The Separate School Board lends interior space as well as outdoor facilities. The project participates in the hiring of personnel.”



“This project affirms my belief that often the process is the product; that setting up a drop-in or a home visiting program or parent relief or whatever is not as important as getting people together to figure out what is needed and how to do it. That process is the real product. ... that has been as valuable to the community and the individuals as the actual services and programs.”



Lessons Learned about Partnerships with Service Providers



1. Time, process, and building interpersonal relationships are important for developing collaborative partnerships with service providers.
2. Successful partnerships with service providers are based on common goals and values.
3. Specific formal mechanisms can facilitate partnerships with service providers.
4. Partnerships with service providers require not just the commitment of individual service providers, but also the commitment of partner organizations.

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“Better Beginnings is not just a thing ... it's the people involved ... getting to know people and developing trust. I have developed friendships and trust, even on a personal level.”



Partnerships with Residents



- *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

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Resident Participation



“... 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)

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Resident Participation



- *Residents participate in a variety of ways, including leadership roles*
- *Resident participation increases over time*
- *Strategies must be put in place to overcome barriers to resident participation*

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How Residents Participate



- *Project governance*
 - Serve on (and chair) Steering Committee, sub-committees (e.g., hiring, finance, research)
 - Decide on budget allocations
 - Hire and evaluate project staff (including project coordinator and researchers)
- *Program planning*
 - Plan, develop and implement new programs
 - Participate in strategic planning for future project activities

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How Residents Participate



- *Advocacy and public relations*
 - Lobbying for government funding and moving from demonstration project to permanent status
 - Making presentations to public officials, community groups, on behalf of project
 - Working at displays in malls and at community events
- *Program delivery*
 - Caring for children
 - Running play-groups, drop-ins, toy lending libraries
 - Facilitating parent groups

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How Residents Participate



- *As paid staff*
 - Project manager and program coordinators
 - Home visitors
 - Educational assistants in the school
 - Child care
- *In research*
 - Hire research staff
 - Review research protocols
 - Advise research team on research plans and procedures

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How Was this Level of Participation Achieved?



Individual Barriers to Participation

- Lack of awareness
- Language and cultural barriers
- Financial barriers
- Work overload

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How Was this Level of Participation Achieved?



Structural Barriers to Participation

- Formality of meetings
- Too many intimidating professionals
- School resistance

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How Was this Level of Participation Achieved?



Strategies Employed to Overcome Barriers

- Community outreach
- Translation services at parent-teacher conferences
- Hiring staff from different cultural backgrounds
- Providing honoraria
- Informality/food
- Mandated 51% resident composition on all project committees

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How Was this Level of Participation Achieved?



Strategies Employed to Overcome Barriers

- Residents have a real voice – play a key role in deciding what programs to offer
- Developing a partnership with the school
- Volunteer recognition
- Professionals acknowledge their power and privilege
- Parents are encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles

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How Was this Level of Participation Achieved?



“The original vision was to have the community have this 51% ownership thing and that is happening. It creates that circle and it could not have been any other way.”

“What we try to do is hire people that reflect the community. So, for example, for the family visitors, there was a West Indian, someone from the Black community, the South Asian community, and there’s someone from the Spanish community.”

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How Was this Level of Participation Achieved?



Maton’s (2008) Qualities of Empowering Settings

- Welcoming, relational environments
- Leadership opportunities
- Mandated resident participation – 51% residents on all committees (systems maintenance and change)
- Many opportunities for participation, opportunity role structure
- Group-based belief system - focused beyond the self on change

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Outcomes of Resident Participation – For the Project



- Feeling of ownership by the community
- Better programs
- Served as a model for other programs

“... They [the residents] feel a little more for the project than people who are just working there ... It's probably moved a lot faster ... The home visitors wouldn't have anywhere to go if parents weren't involved ... The project would have flopped because the parents wouldn't have anything to do with it” (Project staff member)

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Outcomes of Resident Participation – For the Project



- Success at involving local community residents was achieved through a transfer of real power to committees, and through the diligent efforts to recruit, train and provide mentoring and concrete supports to community members
- This achievement set the stage for high levels of volunteerism in communities which traditionally shun involvement in any services

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Outcomes of Resident Participation – For the Community



- Enhanced community safety and security
- Increased sense of community

“...I really think before this (Better Beginnings) was in place it was pockets of people ... I think the neighborhood is now starting to think of itself as a community, and I don't think it was doing that before” (Community resident)

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Outcomes of Resident Participation – For the Residents



“... Sitting on various committees and actually having people seem like they were listening to me ... I started getting respect for the first time in a long time” (Community resident)

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Outcomes of Resident Participation – For the Residents



- Enhanced self-esteem
- Increased knowledge and skills
- Increased social contact and social support
- Development of leadership and advocacy skills
- Stress and burnout
- Dissatisfaction of male partners and children

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Lessons Learned about Partnerships with Community Residents



1. Mandating resident participation is important for engaging the community in community-based prevention and early childhood education programs.
2. Time, process, and building relationships are important for developing collaborative partnerships between community residents and service-providers.
3. Providing multiple ways for residents to participate is important for encouraging resident participation.
4. Practical strategies can be implemented to overcome barriers to resident participation.

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Summary, Conclusions, and Implications



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

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