

**Building Bridges:
Service Provider Involvement in
Better Beginnings, Better Futures**

**April 1995
Executive Summary**

This report describes the involvement of service organizations in seven urban Better Beginnings communities from January 1991 to March 1993. The report uses information from individual site reports prepared by local researchers in each site. For greater detail, a summary report and a full-length report are also available. The major findings from this report are as follows:

- A review of theory and research in the literature on service integration reveals a lack of consistency in defining the concept as well as many ideas about models and strategies for implementation. It reveals a great deal of suggested promise, but no conclusive evidence about what benefits can be expected from integrating services to families.
- Ideas about integration at the proposal development stage included two roles for service providers in local Better Beginnings projects: 1) a role in administration and management, and 2) a role in the planning and delivering of services.
- As the projects were implemented, project participants began to broaden their vision of integration to include a substantial focus on process, and a central role for neighbourhood residents.
- Participants envisioned two different approaches to service integration: 1) hub and spokes - in which the Better Beginnings project is the primary context for and facilitator of integration between itself and external service organizations; 2) web - in which integration is the connections between organizations, both in the context of the local Better Beginnings project, but especially in the broader context in which organizations are linked independent of Better Beginnings. Hub and spokes was the original vision for service integration at five of the seven demonstration sites.

- Site reports indicated that external organizations were highly involved as core Better Beginnings organizations (i.e., involved in two or more programs, or on the project's key decision-making body, or as the sponsoring agency). Other organizations were less involved as peripheral participants. Core organizations represented the three main funding sectors (health, education, social services), as well as other sectors such as recreation, multicultural, housing, and police services. On average, there were seven core organizations participating in Better Beginnings projects.
- Representatives from participating organizations were from all levels (frontline staff; middle management; upper management and executive directors). While some sites shifted to increased frontline representation as projects were implemented, most sites also suggested that management representation was important in allowing sufficient authority and decision-making influence.
- The factors which motivated service organizations to become involved in Better Beginnings were similar to those reported in the proposal development report *Communities Coming Together* and included: support by individual representatives for project values and their sense of commitment to the communities, the opportunity to gain access to resources for existing agencies, and intentional recruitment of agencies by Better Beginnings staff and residents.
- One of the most typical roles for service provider representatives was as consultants in the design of Better Beginnings programs. Six sites used program-focused working groups as a strategy for involving service providers in program development; often service providers participated with project staff and community residents on these work groups.
- Service providers were involved in project administration at all sites by participating as members of boards and subcommittees; as well, each project had one service organization designated as the sponsoring agency which managed the flow of project funding from the government funders.
- Service organizations were involved in the direct delivery of Better Beginnings programs in eight distinct ways:
 - 1) existing programs were brought into the Better Beginnings community by offering Better Beginnings space or auspices (5 sites);
 - 2) existing organizations were enhanced to deliver core Better Beginnings programs (1 site);
 - 3) existing programs were enriched by Better Beginnings resources (4 sites);
 - 4) new programs were created by collaboration between Better Beginnings and other organizations (7 sites);
 - 5) expertise from existing organizations was used to provide training and consultation for Better Beginnings programs (5 sites extensively, 2 sites modestly);

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- 6) case management or active collaboration between Better Beginnings and other organizations was used to help individual families and children (2 sites) and joint referrals (2 sites);
 - 7) resources, space, and equipment from existing organizations were used to enrich Better Beginnings programs (6 sites);
 - 8) existing organizations provided supervision of Better Beginnings staff (2 sites) and secondment of organizations' personnel to Better Beginnings programs (1 site).
- Three broad patterns for service provider involvement in Better Beginnings program delivery were observed:
 - 1) use of multiple methods of collaboration resulting in substantially more instances of cooperation (4 sites);
 - 2) use of a few dominant methods of collaboration (1 site);
 - 3) very little organizational collaboration (2 sites).
 - Lessons from the sites about challenges to implementing service integration in Better Beginnings included factors such as:
 - the limitations of “voluntary” collaboration;
 - unclear mandates and policies;
 - the difficulty adapting to existing bureaucracies;
 - differing expectations and unclear communication;
 - a variety of financial issues;
 - organizations which seemed inappropriate or “didn’t fit” in Better Beginnings;
 - a lack of guidelines about what was expected.
 - Lessons which site participants considered were important to making integration work included:
 - the importance of interpersonal relationships based on mutual trust and respect;
 - a recognition of the importance of allowing sufficient time, as well as a focus on the process;
 - involving agencies with connections and a commitment to the community;
 - an active investment by Better Beginnings project staff and community residents;
 - specific structures such as program-focused work groups, as well as involvement of both frontline and management staff.
 - Within the boundaries of non-mandated, voluntary participation in which organizations retained their autonomy, Better Beginnings was able to initiate a wide variety of new partnerships that were largely focused on specific programs. As a result, many new prevention supports became available to children and families in the demonstration communities.

- It would have been unreasonable to expect more in-depth organizational or interministerial integration from Better Beginnings, Better Futures unless these service integration projects had been given more feasible authority and control over resources to induce other organizations to participate on more than a voluntary nature.