

Chapter 11

PARTNERSHIPS AND PROGRAMS: SERVICE-PROVIDER INVOLVEMENT IN BETTER BEGINNINGS, BETTER FUTURES

INTRODUCTION

In Better Beginnings, Better Futures, partnerships developed among the demonstration projects, other organizations serving the communities, and local residents. This creation of partnerships has resulted in new programs, increased resources, and improved working relationships among partners in the demonstration communities, but Better Beginnings also illustrates plainly the limits of what can be expected from voluntary collaborations between service organizations. It also provides useful guidance about how to proceed under similar circumstances.

This chapter provides a brief summary of the findings in the main service-provider cross-site report (Cameron, Hayward, McKenzie, Hancock & Jeffery, 1999). The evidence for these findings can be found there.

Government Mandate for Service-Provider Integration

According to the original Request for Proposals (Government of Ontario, 1990), the program model for the Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites should be an integrated model:

The Integrated Model requires that within a given community, services for children and families must blend and unite. Integration minimally means that service-providers and educators develop common goals, objectives and collaborative plans for meeting these intents. Conceptually, the Integrated Model moves beyond coordination of services to as full a merging of service planning and delivery as possible (p. 4).

For the younger cohort sites, this meant that programs aimed at reducing risks and promoting optimal development for the pre-natal/infant age group must integrate with programs aimed at reducing risks and promoting optimal development for preschoolers (p. 5). For the older cohort sites, the programs for preschoolers must integrate with programs directed toward reducing risks and promoting optimal development for early elementary school-aged children (p. 5). The Request for Proposals provided the following guidelines for integration:

1. Adapt or circumvent traditional professional or bureaucratic limitations to meet the needs of children and families.
2. Eliminate inter-ministerial, inter-agency segmentation.
3. Establish a locally appropriate plan for integration which focuses on:
 - %i joint personnel, such as hiring of a local Better Beginnings Director, or the scheduling of bi-weekly meetings of the principals and directors, or producing a new inter-organizational chart;
 - %i common facilities, toys, equipment, rooms, secretaries, computers, supplies;
 - %i collective training of staff; and/or
 - %i improved allocation of financial and staff resources for all activities from education and home-visiting to recreation and parent training (p. 10).

In addition to developing an integrated program model, the sites were directed to coordinate with other programs and resources which provide services for children and families that are identified as having problems beyond the scope of the primary prevention services (p. 10).

DEFINING SERVICE INTEGRATION

Although there is inconsistency about terminology in the service integration literature,¹ there does appear to be some common understanding that there are at least three different approaches to integration (Aiken, Dewar, DiTomaso, Hage, & Zeitz, 1975; Gans & Horton, 1975; Hastings, Roberts, Jodin & Hung, undated):

- %i **Voluntary Integration** - a set of organizations are connected loosely and on a voluntary basis. There is no independent structure to provide coordination, and each agency retains its own autonomy. Each organization controls its own services.
- %i **Mediated Integration** - a set of organizations are linked through the efforts of one organization. The coordinating organization takes primary responsibility for guiding the integration, but may also provide direct services. The participating organizations are involved on a voluntary basis.
- %i **Directed Integration** - One organization has a mandate, often including legal and funding authority, to direct the integration of a set of organizations and has the authority to impose decisions on participating organizations. Typically, the coordinating organization does not provide services, but is devoted exclusively to coordinating activities.

For those interested in developing organizational partnerships, little guidance is available on specific strategies. The development of practical strategies for fostering service integration or collaboration is still in its early stages.

The vision of service-provider involvement at most Better Beginnings sites remained consistent over the duration of the project. There continue to be two general roles for service-provider involvement in Better Beginnings, Better Futures. Service-providers were to participate in management and administration, and to contribute to the delivery of the programs. All sites, except Sudbury, continue to have service-providers participate in project governance and management. At most sites, service-providers continue to participate in program delivery. In Cornwall, Guelph, Ottawa, and Kingston, the original vision of integration was broadened to include residents along with service-providers. Resident participation continues to be an important aspect of the vision at all of the sites.

There are two visions of service integration at the sites: (1) a hub-and-spokes vision; and, (2) a web vision. In the hub-and-spokes vision, the project remains the centre of planning and implementation for project activities. Agencies function as the spokes, and participate in a variety of activities at the sites. Their involvement with each other is mediated by the project with few, if any, external connections between agencies. Currently, there is commitment to this vision at the majority of sites (Highfield, Guelph, Kingston, Toronto, Sudbury).

¹ Several authors have come to the conclusion that there is a lack of clarity and agreement in the social integration literature (Aiken *et al.*, 1975; Deber, Rondeau, & Beatty, 1990; Hagebak, 1979; Martin, Chackerian, Imershein, & Frumkin., 1983; Redburn, 1977; Weiss, 1981). Some authors (Deber *et al.*, 1990; Martin *et al.*, 1983; Redburn, 1977; Weiss, 1981) have pointed out that, while there are some generally accepted definitions, they are too broad and vague to be useful in clarifying the concept.

The web vision promotes relationships among participating agencies within and outside the project context. The agencies involved create a web of services and resources that are available to the community. In this vision, the role of the project is to assist in creating links between itself and other agencies as well as facilitating links between different agencies. Currently, the vision at two sites (Cornwall, Ottawa) is most indicative of the web model.

The focus on visioning that characterized the early years of the projects has given way to collaboration in the creation, planning, and delivery of programs. In defining and implementing an integrated model, many of the sites felt hampered by a lack of direction from funders and lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. Furthermore, the sites were concerned about what they saw as unrealistic expectations outlined in the Request for Proposals (Government of Ontario, 1990). Most sites report little or no success in circumventing traditional barriers, and consider elimination of inter-ministerial and inter-agency segmentation beyond their reach. Site reports offer the opinion that, given the size and scope of the demonstration projects, the expectation that Better Beginnings, Better Futures would be able to effect broad change in delivery systems was unrealistic.

Overall, service integration at most sites closely parallels a voluntary or mediated integration. The language of partners or partnerships is used at most sites (Cornwall, Highfield, Guelph, Toronto, Sudbury) to describe the relationship that exists between the sites and service agencies. Most sites have witnessed a strengthening of their relationships with other community organizations over time, and are working to encourage these partnerships. Service-providers are actively involved in programming with Better Beginnings, Better Futures, and there is an increasing reciprocity in the exchange of resources and expertise.

MOTIVATION FOR PARTNERSHIPS

There is general agreement in the literature about the motivation for service collaboration. One common argument is that existing service networks are excessively fragmented, overly complex, and lead to duplication, waste, and confusion among service users (Cameron, Karabanow, Laurendeau & Chamberland, 1999; Family Resource Coalition, 1993; O Looney, 1995; Wharf, 1994). Consequently, there is the belief that inter-organizational partnerships will improve the efficiency, accessibility, flexibility, and responsiveness of social services (Cameron *et al.*, 1999; Harbert, Finnegan & Tyler, 1997; Taylor, Brooks, Phanindis & Rossmo, 1991). Further, some argue that services will be enriched and more effective for consumers (Family Resource Coalition, 1993; Kagan, 1991).

Recently, some authors have described more tangible reasons for collaborative efforts; that is, reasons that would directly benefit those organizations involved. Kagan (1991) argues that collaboration may increase access to resources or compensate for needed resources. Bailey and McNally Koney (1996) argue that the political climate favouring reduced spending and tax cuts increases competition among social service organizations. They assert that:

As competition increases, collaboration is gaining attention as a method whereby local health and social service organizations, community leaders, and neighbourhood businesses can increase their access to resources and policymakers (p. 604).

Being in agreement on basic principles and having similar mandates were common reasons for service-provider involvement in Better Beginnings, Better Futures. Six sites suggest that having similar goals and values remains one of the primary reasons for agencies becoming involved. Two indicate that commitment to enhancing service delivery and to developing a collaborative model were factors. Three

sites report that some agencies were motivated by their perception that they would be able to provide more services to children and families in the community. Three sites stated that service-providers were motivated by increased access to services and quality programming for children and community residents. Four of the sites report that agencies became involved in order to better carry out their own mandates. Collaboration between the project and service-providers allows for the sharing of space, for greater access to programs for children and families, and for both the project and the agency to disseminate information about its programs and activities.

In addition, three sites indicated that some organizations initially became involved with the project as a way of securing monies to operate their own programs and activities, which were threatened by funding cuts. Several sites indicated that they had developed a positive reputation through their commitment to children, families, and communities, through the programs that they offered, and because of their favorable working relationships with other community organizations. In turn, the sites' reputation has encouraged other agencies to become involved with them.

A PROJECT FOCUS FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Early in the sites' development, service-providers served two roles (Cameron, Vanderwoerd, & Peters, 1995): (1) as expert consultants and advisors in program development and (2) as project-governors and decision-makers. Through the creation of structures such as small working groups and sub-committees, many of the sites were able to use the professional expertise of service-providers to develop the various components of the program model (e.g., home visitors, childcare, and nutrition). Similarly, at all the sites, service-providers were able to participate in the governance of the project through steering committees. At most sites, service-providers participated in the hiring of staff and, at four sites, they helped with training initial project personnel. They assisted in joint supervision of program staff at two of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites.

At all the sites except one (Sudbury), service-providers continue to contribute to decision-making through participation on working groups and steering committees. The role of service-providers has changed as the demonstration sites have developed. In the early stages, service-providers had a broader range of involvement, including greater involvement in day-to-day management. However, as project staff were hired, service-providers focused more on participating in project governance, and they provided guidance for program content and staff training.

Many of the sites continue to have agency representation from many service sectors, including social services, health, education, and other, non-ministerial, agencies. The number of agencies involved ranged from five to thirteen in 1999. Since the time of the original cross-site report, some sites have witnessed an increase in the number of primary agency partners (Cornwall, Guelph, Kingston), others have seen few changes (Highfield, Ottawa, Toronto) and one (Sudbury) has fewer primary agency partners. Despite the fluctuations that have occurred over the past few years, a stable core group of agencies continues to be involved at most sites. Early in the project's development, small groups or committees were established in different areas such as community development, childcare, pre-natal/early childhood supports, or finances. Service-providers with relevant expertise participated in these working groups. Through similar structures, service-providers continue to contribute to planning and development of programs.

The projects both provide and receive resources from other agencies to enrich programming. The most common exchanges between the project and service agencies are the use of space and facilities at all the sites, and training for staff and residents at all sites except Sudbury. There has been an increase since 1995 in the sharing of resources, equipment, and space by agencies at four sites (Highfield, Guelph,

Toronto, Sudbury). In addition, there has been an increase in sharing of training and expertise at two sites (Highfield, Guelph).

At the Highfield, Ottawa and Sudbury sites, there has been an increase in collaboration between the demonstration sites and community agencies to create new programs. Two sites (Cornwall, Guelph) have partnered with agencies to deliver core Better Beginnings, Better Futures programs, resulting in increased participation by outside agencies in delivering site programs. Some sites have made arrangements that have allowed for the provision of staffing by an agency in return for shared programming (Highfield, Kingston, Sudbury). Other contributions include consultations and administrative or staffing supports. Sites continue to provide joint programming with other organizations, and some sites have evolved towards more joint programming efforts and greater sharing of resources with other agencies (Cornwall, Highfield, Kingston, Toronto) or more stability in joint programming relationships with service-providers (Guelph).

BETTER BEGINNINGS, BETTER FUTURES AS CATALYST

Better Beginning, Better Futures has played a number of roles in fostering the collaborations, ranging from supporting *ad hoc* collaborations to developing formal agreements. Better Beginnings, Better Futures acts as a catalyst, drawing organizations and agencies together to collaborate around the needs of children and their families. There has been general recognition from service-providers that there would have been no collaboration without the initiative of Better Beginnings. As the projects added staff, at least two sites observed a growing dependency by agencies on Better Beginnings staff to initiate involvement and to coordinate the practical details of collaboration:

When staff were hired the responsibility of facilitating integration seemed to lie with the Project's supervisory staff. ... The Project's staff members have taken the lead in coordinating most of these programs. They have taken responsibility for scheduling planning meetings, evaluations, booking space, purchasing food and preparing snacks, setting up and taking down program equipment, and for calling participants with announcements. (Toronto)

OBSTACLES TO PARTNERSHIPS

Increased professionalization and specialized agency mandates make connections between service organizations more difficult. Each group of professionals has its own set of values, assumptions, and ideologies, which may not be congruent with those of other professional groups (Aiken *et al.*, 1975; Bruner, 1991). Hagebak (1979) argues that these agency and professional blinders make it difficult to conceptualize anything as comprehensive as an integrated local delivery system. Morrill (1996) concurs: ...the character of the existing delivery system includes significant interconnected and self-reinforcing features, such as categorical program fragmentation and categorical funding. The reformers are continually faced with a never-ending set of issues that forces them back towards the status quo and eventually exhausts them (p. 192).

O Looney (1997) argues that service integration projects may fail because of a lack of clear definitions and an identifiable starting point for the project. Divergent pressures and self-interests make it difficult to achieve positive relationships and trust between participants (Hagebak, 1979). Many authors recognize that differences in legal mandates, operating regulations, and accountability methods pose formidable obstacles to greater service integration (Beatrice, 1990; Bruner, 1991; Deber *et al.*, 1990; Hagebak, 1979;

Koppich & Kirst, 1993; Weiss, 1981). Several authors comment that the lack of funding to support integration processes or financial incentives for agencies to integrate are significant barriers (Bruner, 1991; Hagebak, 1979; Koppich & Kirst, 1993; Weiss, 1981).

Some authors have pointed out that integration is difficult simply because it requires a great deal of time for systems to change, and for relationships to develop between people and organizations (Bloomberg, 1994; Bruner, 1991; O Looney, 1997). In addition, integration invariably involves the shifting of influence and resources among organizations. Resistance to giving up control and power (Koppich & Kirst, 1993; O Looney, 1997), protection of traditional areas of service (Weiss, 1981), and clarifying and defining roles for participating organizations (Ellmer, Lein, & Hormuth, 1995; Karp, 1990) all present substantial barriers to achieving integration.

The Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites continue to encounter several obstacles to collaboration. By far the most commonly mentioned is severe funding cuts to many of the service-providers involved in the collaborations. The lack of time and resources available at individual agencies seriously decreased the resources available to the collaboration.

Many of the sites have alluded to an inability to communicate and solve problems effectively, due to a lack of trust between agencies and between service-providers and residents. The length of time required to develop trusting relationships continues to be a common barrier to the involvement of service-providers. Funding and time constraints, resulting in inconsistent representation and irregular attendance on the various committees, hindered involvement.

At least two sites experienced some difficulty establishing common objectives for the collaborative effort because service agencies had differing mandates and different ways of working. Some service-providers felt they could not justify their involvement to their Boards of Directors given that their mandate was to serve a broader population (based on age or neighbourhood) than Better Beginnings, Better Futures does.

The negative attitudes of some community members towards professionals and the attitudes of some professionals were identified as obstacles to involvement. Although all of the sites worked to overcome these obstacles, Toronto identified negative perceptions as a challenge more often than the other sites. The Guelph site reported that a barrier to involvement was the difficulty in sorting out issues of power and control. Three sites suggested that an obstacle to encouraging service-provider involvement was finding appropriate balances in participation by service-providers, community residents, and staff.

WHAT WORKS WELL IN PARTNERSHIPS

The great diversity in the types of service integration initiatives described in the literature limits our capacity to identify general patterns and to draw lessons for future service integration efforts. Nonetheless, with these limitations in mind, it is possible to abstract some lessons for service integration projects from the literature reviewed.

Merkel-Holguin, Printz Winterfeld, Harper, Coburn, and Fluke (1997) recommend developing a statement of philosophy to guide the implementation of neighbourhood service integration. They also suggest involving service-providers from a broad range of agencies serving the neighbourhood, as well as neighbourhood leaders, in the planning and implementation of the project, including their involvement on a local advisory board. Substantial time should be allocated for planning, start-up, and coordination. Co-location of key services is identified as an important strategy, as are the development of joint team staffing and shared agency workloads. Ongoing communication among all stakeholders is believed to be

critical and should be reciprocal between community residents and inter-agency team members. Training and education of agency personnel, project staff, and the community members is also important.

Many authors note that having a common vision, as well as common goals and values, is important in helping a collaboration to proceed smoothly, and to overcome barriers when they arise (Armstrong, 1997; Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996; Deber *et al.*, 1990; Gray, 1985; Greenley, 1992; Hastings *et al.*, undated). In some cases, researchers have argued that participating organizations with similar funding sources, service populations, and geographic areas are important in making collaborations more successful (Bloomberg, 1994; Deber *et al.*, 1990; Taylor *et al.*, 1991; Yessian, 1995).

Collaboration initiatives need to invest a considerable amount of time into their development process (Cameron *et al.*, 1999; Ellmer *et al.*, 1995; Gans & Horton, 1975; Hassett & Austin, 1997; Merkel-Holguin *et al.*, 1997; O Looney, 1994; Vander-Schie, Wagenfield, & Worgess, 1987). The importance of commitment to the collaboration, good communication among partners, and a willingness to be flexible are cited as facilitating factors in collaboration efforts (Adams & Nelson, 1997; Armstrong, 1997; Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996; Dinnebeil, Hale, & Rule, 1996; Ellmer *et al.*, 1995; Harbert *et al.*, 1997).

Good leadership skills also are necessary. (Armstrong, 1997; Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996; Kagan, 1991). Many authors note the importance of those with decision-making authority being involved in the collaboration (Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996; Ellmer *et al.*, 1995; Greenley, 1992). In addition, it is necessary that front-line staff and community members accept and understand the purpose of the collaboration (Adams & Nelson, 1997; Bloomberg, 1994; Hassett & Austin, 1997).

It is also necessary to have sufficient resources (Deber *et al.*, 1990; Ellmer *et al.*, 1995; Kagan, 1991). These usually include money, staff, technology and training (Kagan, 1991) Some authors claim that successful integration depends on ongoing monitoring and evaluation because participants need feedback on how they are doing and what adjustments should be made (Greenley, 1992).

The Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites have identified what they have found to be useful approaches to facilitating service-provider involvement in their voluntary collaborative efforts. Good interpersonal relations based on mutual trust and respect emerge as a key factor to working together effectively. The importance of allowing sufficient time for relationships to build and for the collaboration to evolve is recognized. Respectful and trusting partnerships between service-providers and community residents develop as they get to know each other personally.

Several sites commented that developing good working relationships is easier when agencies have existing commitments to the community. These agencies often share similar philosophies with Better Beginnings, Better Futures and are familiar with the residents and the community.

A few sites mentioned specific formal mechanisms that helped to build relationships between the project and service-providers. In recognition of time constraints, several sites developed small, task-focused groups in which both residents and service-providers participated. In addition to being a comfortable way to introduce residents and service-providers, they were seen as useful structures to facilitate service-provider involvement in program development.

While it is essential to have the endorsement of front-line staff, individuals with decision-making authority also need to be involved. Front-line staff need to understand the collaboration so they can provide service appropriately. Decision-makers need to champion the collaborations and to make supportive policy decisions within their own agencies.

BENEFITS FROM PARTNERSHIPS

Kagan (1991) contends that collaborations have two broad goals: improving direct services for families and fostering change in delivery systems. However, there is debate about whether collaborations should be held accountable for both types of outcomes. Despite these difficulties, Kagan states that:

... through case study and other qualitative methods, evidence that collaborations are making a difference is mounting ... Often expressing their success in terms of enhanced trust, communication, and understanding, collaborators hasten to report that simply bringing together diverse groups who have never spoken, thereby establishing the collaboration, is an important accomplishment. And indeed it is (p. 74).

Ellmer *et al.* (1995) describe the Texas Children's Mental Health Plan (TCMHP) as a state-funded interagency initiative developed to provide a range of core services to children with emotional disturbance and their families (p. 346). Based upon a qualitative investigation, including interviews, researchers observations, and a review of documents, the authors report many positive impacts:

... agencies developed a better understanding of each other's mandates and limitations. With this new background information available, agencies opened better lines of communication among themselves, making further collaboration easier to both conceive and implement. As agencies interacted and worked with each other, systemic problems were most easily discovered and corrected. Another positive outcome of the TCMHP was the development of more extensive and improved services ... (p. 350).

On the other hand, integration efforts often have not lived up to expectations. Despite the studies suggesting positive impacts, there are more studies and reviews which question the impact of service integration, particularly on improvements in outcomes for users of services. For example, Bickman (1996) reports that an 80-million-dollar project to test whether a continuum of mental health and substance abuse services for children and adolescents is more cost-effective found that the new system had better access, greater continuity of care, and more participant satisfaction, and used restrictive services. But there were no improvements in service participant outcomes. He concludes that ...[service integration]...is unlikely to improve client outcomes unless it also reforms the actual services delivered (p. 699).

Pandiani and Maynard (1993) conclude that despite the intuitive and common sense appeal of interagency collaboration, the results reported in the literature on its effectiveness are checkered at best (p. 87). Similarly, Rotherum-Borus (1997) concludes that the data [on service integration] have not supported the importance of this factor for improving children's outcomes ... (p. 139). The most common conclusion in the literature is that there is insufficient evidence to judge whether integration improves service outcomes, reduces costs, lessens service fragmentation, and improve services accessibility (Deber *et al.*, 1990; Frumkin, Imershein, Chackerian, & Martin, 1983; Martin *et al.*, 1983; Oliver, 1990; Pandiani & Maynard, 1993; Runkle-Hooyman, 1976; Wharf, 1994).

Perhaps the most dramatic impact of Better Beginnings, Better Futures partnerships has been the increased level of programming and resources available to residents. Besides delivering programs directly through the Better Beginnings, Better Futures projects, agencies were drawn into the community by the projects' space, resources and auspices. All of the sites described many examples of programming and resource benefits from service-provider partnerships with Better Beginnings, Better Futures.

Increased visibility of participating agencies within the community is one of the most frequently mentioned benefits to service-providers from their involvement in collaborations. Motivations for becoming involved in a collaboration are diverse, yet the entrance gained to the community by being affiliated with a grass-roots project is a common enticement.

Greater efforts at joint programming and sharing of resources have expanded programs in a number of ways. A few successful programs have been picked up by other service-providers, some programs are being offered outside of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures neighbourhood, and some programs are enriched by a sharing of resources. At some sites, Better Beginnings, Better Futures plays a role in assisting groups to obtain additional funding to help them expand or to create new resources, especially outside of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures mandate. In addition, Better Beginnings, Better Futures encourages other services and agencies to enter their neighbourhoods by sharing the resources and reputation of the Project. Through cooperation on this practical level, services have been expanded to provide a greater range of resources for the community.

Better Beginnings, Better Futures programs also benefit from the supports provided by other agencies. The types of assistance offered by other programs include supervision, training, technical expertise, space, resources, and equipment. As service-providers collaborate more often, they learn more about the programs offered. They can better use the resources available by making more appropriate referrals for the residents who need assistance. Sites reported that larger referral networks have evolved and are considered a benefit of collaboration.

Some Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites have developed new structures to enable other organizations to cooperate. Coalitions or other structures have been developed to look at issues that do not fall within the Better Beginnings mandate, but in which the project participates. For example, the Community Action Group in Cornwall incorporated as a result of the demonstration project's efforts to allow other community organizations to cooperate in prevention initiatives. At the Guelph site, the neighbourhood model of partnership has been adopted by other communities in the city. The Toronto site's childcare working group evolved into a childcare network for dialogue among childcare providers in the neighbourhood.

A benefit of working with other agencies and community residents is the learning that occurs. Not only do agencies learn more about the community and its resources, but they also learn how to work more cooperatively with other service-providers. As a result of learning about communities and resident involvement, service-providers report new ways of assessing how accessible their services are. In addition, many of the sites noticed a greater level of commitment among service-providers as a result of participating in an effective collaboration. Struggling to develop common values and vision to provide better can positively influence the way agencies work together. This experience is transferable when forging partnerships with other agencies:

That's true, we're speaking of two agencies which used to be acting like cat and mouse. But since they got around our table, they've put their opposite opinions aside and they're now supporting each other. They share their expertise with the project, and both agencies benefit from this experience. (Toronto)

When the project began to develop their health and family support programs, both the public health department and the community health centre participated. Although these two agencies had similar mandates and served a similar group, they had rarely worked closely together prior to Better Beginnings. As a result of their work together with the project however, these two agencies have begun to develop a relationship and held discussions around ways in which their health

services can be offered in a more complementary way. (Guelph)

Our organization has gained a new idea of how to work in a relationship mode...this has had a positive effect on our ways of working. (Ottawa)

THE UNIQUE SITUATION AT WALPOLE ISLAND

The Walpole Island experience is unique among all eight Better Beginnings site. The philosophies and values of the Native community influence all aspects of Better Beginnings. The Band Council, which has the power to restructure community services, has influenced the integration of services not only at Better Beginnings, Better Futures, but for all services provided on the Island. The Band Council has promoted service integration by setting up the Partnerships Task Force (developed in 1996), which has a representative from all social and educational services of Walpole Island First Nation, including Better Beginnings. A hub-and-spokes vision may be present at this site, as it is at several others; however, the hub is the Band Council, not Better Beginnings, Better Futures. The Partnerships Task Force was to develop a structure and process for the integration/coordination of services.

According to information provided by the site, service-providers were to be involved in Better Beginnings in two general roles: the administration and management of the project by serving on committees and the development and delivery of the prevention programs. At this site, it is important that service-providers first become involved in a group consultation process of integration; that is, a process of discussing and identifying community needs and how best to serve them. The original vision was to have service-providers involved who serve children in the 0 to 4 age range, as well those who fall outside that age range.

Service-providers are involved in project administration by sitting on the project's Steering Committee. Prior to start-up, an Advisory Group was formed and service-providers from various agencies/programs on the Island (e.g., Band Council, Health Centre, Social Services) were involved. A service-provider from the Parent/Child Support Program (PCSP) has also been involved on the Restructuring Committee. The organizations/services that have been most consistently involved in project administration include the PCSP, the Bkejwanong Children Centre, the Band Council, the Health Centre, and a community services agency.

The program heads from the PCSP and the Bkejwanong Children's Centre have been most involved in program planning and development. Both of these organizations have worked very closely with Better Beginnings over the years to develop programming for children aged 0 to 4. The project has been less successful in involving organizations in programming to service residents outside that age range.

Better Beginnings has worked closely with both the PCPS and the Bkejwanong Children's Centre in providing services. Three Family Support Workers, funded by Better Beginnings, work at these sites. The three workers conduct home visits, as well as assist with the playgroup and drop-in. With Better Beginnings assistance, the PCPS has been able to expand its programs to serve families with children up to age 4; prior to Better Beginnings, the upper age limit was 2. The Better Beginnings Outreach Facilitators have also worked with these organizations to provide Native language and cultural instruction. Staff at the PCPS are responsible for the supervision of the Family Support Workers. The Outreach Facilitators have also provided assistance to the Native language teacher in the Walpole Island elementary school.

OVERVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP FINDINGS

- %i The vision of service-provider involvement at the Better Beginnings, Better Futures demonstration sites has remained quite constant over the duration of the project. Service-providers were to be involved in the governance of the projects and in the development of new programs. At most sites, Better Beginnings, Better Futures was to be the hub for service integration efforts with only two sites envisioning organizational collaborations independent of the demonstration project. Changes in the mandates of existing organizations and the functioning of the funding ministries were seen as unrealistic for such relatively small projects.
- %i In the early years of Better Beginnings, Better Futures, the sites had great difficulty understanding how to translate the idea of facilitating service integration into practice. Over time, less effort was invested in defining service integration as attention turned to creating voluntary partnerships with service agencies in order to increase resources and programming in the demonstration communities.
- %i Service-providers became involved in these voluntary collaboration both because they shared similar objectives to Better Beginnings, Better Futures and because they saw possibilities for improving their access to resources and/or improving their services through the partnerships. As the reputation of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures projects improved over the demonstration period, outside agencies saw increased advantages in connecting with neighbourhood-based participatory project with networks and credibility different from their own.
- %i All sites except one continued to have a stable core of service-providers involved with the project from 1995 to 1999. Overall, the numbers of agencies involved and the diversity of exchanges taking place increased over this time period.
- %i There is agreement that Better Beginnings, Better Futures is the catalyst for most of these voluntary collaborations. There is general recognition that these partnerships would not have been formed without the initiative of Better Beginnings, Better Futures personnel and volunteers.
- %i A number of obstacles made these voluntary partnerships more difficult to realize. Financial cutbacks at participating agencies decreased the resources available for the collaborations. The time required to develop trust and differences in mandates and self-interests were common obstacles. Sorting out issues of power and control was a challenge, as was balancing the involvement of service-providers and residents in the projects.
- %i Good interpersonal relationships based on mutual trust and respect were considered essential to the productive partnerships that developed. This trust took a lot of time to develop. Several sites commented that partnerships were easier with agencies that shared similar mandates and had existing commitments to the neighbourhood.
- %i The creation of partnerships has resulted in the creation of significant new resources and programming in each demonstration community that would not exist without these collaborations. This has come about through joint programming, by finding new sources of funding, by encouraging agencies to locate in the neighbourhoods, and by mutual enrichment of programming between Better Beginnings, Better Futures and partner agencies.
- %i Increased visibility and accessibility for the services of the partner agencies in the demonstration communities are frequently mentioned benefits of these partnerships. Service-providers also

comment their involvement has changed their attitudes about communities and residents and about the appropriateness of their own programs.

%f Better working relations between partner agencies and more positive attitudes towards collaboration also are reported. In three communities, new structures supporting ongoing dialogue among agencies outside of the auspices of Better Beginnings, Better Futures have come from the demonstration project.