

## Chapter 4

### PROGRAMS FOR BETTER BEGINNINGS

This chapter will begin with a description of the major programming activities offered at the Better Beginnings sites, followed by an overview of the sites' program models, and a comparison of their similarities and differences. Next will be a description of how some programs changed over time. The chapter will conclude with an examination of influences on programming such as: culture/ethnicity; government; leadership; and the relationship with the host agency.

#### MAJOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

In the reports on the program models used at their sites, Site Researchers were asked to describe each of the major Better Beginnings programs operating in their communities. Appendix A at the end of this report presents a brief summary of all of the programs that were listed in these reports. Well over one hundred major programs are described. These have been grouped into four main categories: programs that focus primarily on children and families; programs primarily for parents; school-based programs; and programs for the entire community. These groupings are somewhat artificial; because of the integrated nature of programming in each of the sites, many of the programs could have been listed in two or more categories. The following is a brief overview of these major programming categories.

#### Child- and Family-Focused Programs

*Younger Cohort Sites.* The home or family visitor program was an important program in the five demonstration sites. While there are variations in the way this visiting occurs from site to site, and in who conducts the visits, the kinds of things that happen during the visits are similar from one site to another. Home or family visitors engage in a number of activities with the parents whom they visit such as:

- " discuss with the parents about child growth and development and nutrition
- " help solve problems and deal with crises
- " inform parents about Better Beginnings programs and other programs/services available in the community
- " make referrals to outside agencies, and advocate on behalf of the families with those agencies with regard to issues such as housing or immigration.

While most of the visits occur in the family's home, the visitors will occasionally accompany the parent or child, or both, on a visit to a doctor, community program, or social service appointment. The home visits are designed to achieve a number of important project goals. Among other things, the visits are intended:

- " to reduce the isolation of parents who have little social contact because they have young children at home
- " to increase parents' knowledge about child development and their ability to protect and nurture their children
- " to strengthen the parent-child relationship
- " to promote empowerment in the parents and enhance their self-confidence and self-esteem
- " to reduce parents' feelings of stress
- " to reduce levels of child abuse in the community
- " to enhance the health and the social and cognitive development of children.

In order to provide for children at the upper end of the 0 to 4 year age range, the younger cohort sites have established a variety of playgroup and childcare programs. A number of the childcare programs are designed to provide care for the child while the parent participates in one of the site programs or attends Better Beginnings meetings, and so children participate without their parents being present. Other programs, particularly those referred to as "drop-ins," involve both parents or caregivers and children. All provide a variety of activities and toys, and a nutritious snack for the children who attend. The objective of these programs is to enhance the health and the cognitive and social development of the child. In addition, the program staff hope to enhance the parenting skills of participating parents, reduce those parents' feelings of stress and isolation, and promote social interaction among families in the community.

**Older Cohort Sites.** Many of the programs for children and families in the older cohort sites parallel programs offered in the younger cohort communities. For example, all three of the projects conduct home visits. Home-visitors provide information about Better Beginnings and other community programs and services; help deal with problems and crises faced by the families; talk about the kinds of things the parents can do to ensure optimal growth and development of their children; provide emotional support; and advocate on behalf of the families. In one of the sites, the home visitors also spend a half-day each week in the Junior Kindergarten classroom, which many of the project children attend. This allows the home visitor to provide a link between the school and the home – she can keep the parents informed about how the child is progressing in school.

Because of the age of the children involved in the older cohort projects, these projects typically stage many more programs in which children get together for a variety of activities without their parents. Since the children are in school most of the day, these programs often run before and after school and on weekends. They provide a safe place for the children to play and involve a variety of activities, including sports and games, arts and crafts, music, and cooking. Another important aspect of these programs is that they try to keep the activities educational.

### **School-Based Programs**

In the older cohort communities, much of the focus in programming for children centres on the school. Each of the three older cohort projects has staff working with teachers and children to enhance the kind of educational and/or social experience children have in school. Better Beginnings staff working in the school are involved in a wide range of activities. For example, they:

- " assist in the preparation of instructional materials
- " help supervise students in the classroom, schoolyard, and on school outings
- " help the children with reading and language activities
- " guide story-telling and drama activities
- " participate in problem-solving and social skills programs
- " lead cooperative games.

These activities are designed to improve children's academic and language skills, improve their self-esteem and self-confidence, reduce behaviour and academic problems that can give rise to the need for assessment and treatment, increase school attendance, improve children's social skills, and help them establish supportive relationships with others (both children and adults).

One of the key elements in programming within the schools is nutrition. In each of the older cohort communities, there were concerns that children were coming to school hungry or that they were not eating nutritious foods, and that this made it difficult for children to learn in school, as well as being detrimental to their health. The sites therefore established a program to provide children with snacks or meals.

### **Parent-Focused Programs**

In developing programs at the various Better Beginnings sites, there has been a recognition of the key role that parents play in the well-being of their children. Consequently, many of the projects have developed programs that focus primarily on parents.

In the younger cohort sites, a number of these programs are for parents who are expecting a child. Discussions focus on issues such as preparations for childbirth, life with a new baby, breast-feeding, budgeting, tours of hospital maternity wards, links to other services within the community, and the effect a new baby has on marital relations. There are also discussion and education groups for parents after their babies are born. These focus on issues such as child development, time management, discipline, and self-esteem. Some of these programs also provide food, breast pumps, formula, diapers, milk coupons, and so on if the participants need them. The goals of these groups and workshops are to help prepare the family for the new baby; to increase parents' knowledge about child health, care and development; and to increase parents' confidence and feelings of being supported.

A second type of parent-focused program is designed primarily to give parents a break from parenting and to engage in activities that are more social and recreational. The need for some relief from isolation and the constant demands of caring for a new baby is evident in the names given to some of these programs—for example, the "Parent Take-a-Break" program and the "Take-a-Break Parent Discussion Group." While the discussion in these groups often relates to parenting issues, many of the activities are designed to give parents a break from childcare. The primary goals of such programs are to reduce parents' feelings of isolation and stress, to enhance their social and support networks, and to build feelings of competence and self-esteem.

### **Community-Focused Programs**

There is perhaps nothing that better represents the creativity, ingenuity, and unique nature of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures initiative than the many and diverse programs that have been developed to enhance the life of the entire communities in which these projects are based. Some of the more specific goals of this part of the initiative, as outlined in the various site reports on their program models, are to:

- " develop community leaders
- " build community spirit
- " support and strengthen cultural understanding and sensitivity
- " establish and maintain strong, active, representative community organizations
- " increase social and recreational opportunities
- " develop attractive, safe, and accessible places for children to play
- " increase the skills, knowledge, and education of community members.

Community leadership is developed by programs such as the "leadership group" in one of the sites, which encourages people to take a leadership role in publicizing the project, organizing events, and lobbying for resources. Community spirit is built by people working together in programs such as the community gardens or kitchens and bulk food-buying cooperatives established in a number of Better Beginnings communities. Such programs help achieve a number of goals, in that they address the nutritional needs of community members (at reduced cost), while building a sense of community. Community spirit is also enhanced by the many celebrations and special events that Better Beginnings projects have sponsored and organized in their communities. Many of these events have featured different ethnic and cultural groups in the communities and have thereby served to strengthen the community's cultural understanding and sensitivity and to reduce racism.

Not surprisingly, several of the community-focused programs are concerned with the safety and well-being of children. One community held a Child Identification Day in which a community celebration was combined with the photographing and fingerprinting of children. Another Better Beginnings site held forums to identify and address safety problems within their neighbourhood. In one of the communities, neighbourhood youth get together with police in an attempt to promote safe and healthy neighbourhoods. A site focused on providing a safe community runs a program called Project HOW, which plans and implements violence-prevention programs in the neighbourhood, including running a safety audit, focus groups, a women s training group, a men s group, and children s activities.

## **PROGRAM MODEL SUMMARIES FOR THE EIGHT DEMONSTRATION SITES**

The information in this section supplements the overview of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures projects presented in Chapter 1. A more detailed summary of the program model at each demonstration site is presented. These are intended to provide a context for the interpretation of outcomes which follow later.

### **Younger Cohort Sites**

#### **Guelph**

Onward Willow Better Beginnings, Better Futures places a strong emphasis on community development and empowering residents to assume greater control of their community. A guiding principle behind the project is that everyone should have a voice. As well, there is a high value placed on partnerships between the project and other agencies and organizations, and between residents and service providers.

Most of Onward Willow programs and activities take place in two centres located in the Willow Road neighbourhood: Onward Willow Centre and the Family Gateway Centre. In addition, the local public school is the site for many youth programs and neighbourhood events. Both Better Beginnings centres have community kitchens and multi-purpose office or meeting areas. Both places are used for socializing with neighbours and obtaining information. The programming at the project is quite diverse and there is comparatively less concentration of resources in particular program areas. In fact, there is a total of 40 different programs or activities described at this site. Family visiting uses approximately one-third of the Better Beginnings core government budget. The family visiting program has one full-time supervisor and four part-time visitors. The program is available for parents with children under 4, and the focus of the visits is on playing with the children, identifying family needs and providing information and support to meet those needs, encouraging participation in project and community activities, and accompanying parents to appointments. Approximately 120 families are visited in a year, with about 70 families receiving regular visits.

Programs for preschoolers and parents is another main area of programming. Included in this area are a large number of different activities including a playgroup for children 2 ½ to 5 years of age (approximately 25 children attend), a parent and child drop-in which is run two mornings a week (approximately 30-35 children attend), Books for Birthdays which provides books for children from infancy to grade 1, kindergarten readiness which focuses on school readiness skills (approximately 8 children participate, most of whom are English as a second language students), a toy/book lending library (approximately 150 children have used the library), and a variety of parent workshops (e.g., PS - I Love You, 1-2-3 Magic, Nobody s Perfect, Keep it Cool, Anger Management, Make it and Take it, and Get Along with Your child). The workshops have ranged from 1 to 8 sessions, and are offered 40 weeks out of each year (approximately 80 parents have attended various workshops).

Community development processes and values have been central to developing the project and deciding on programming priorities. The recruitment and training of community leaders also has been an important component of the project. Onward Willow Better Beginnings is the only site with an independent residents association which influences program development. This site also had a very high number of resident volunteer hours; for example, approximately 55,000 resident volunteer hours were documented at the Guelph site between 1994 and 1997.

Onward Willow Better Beginnings also had a strong investment in broader community development efforts that resulted in the creation of resources outside of their official Better Beginnings mandate, and in a broad range of activities inside and outside of their neighbourhood. This has increased the diversity of programs and activities offered at this site. A fundraising committee was developed to raise the funds necessary to run additional activities. Approximately \$90,000 per year is raised. Additional activities offered by the site include programs for school-aged children and youth including after school programs, camps and drop-ins, special interest groups (e.g., karate, cooking club, Vietnamese group for parents and children), employment readiness and skills workshops, adult education, clothing program, emergency food supplies, and legal clinic. The project also raised \$120,000 for a Stay in School program.

### **Kingston**

Better Beginnings for Kingston Children is committed to the development of primary prevention programs and community ownership. One of the guiding values is that partnerships among agencies, and between agencies and community residents, should be developed.

The strongest concentration of programming resources is on the family visitor program. Over one-half of the Better Beginnings core government budget is devoted to this program. It is modelled after the Parents Helping Parents program and strives to provide information on all phases of healthy infant and child development. The family visitor is responsible for assisting parents by providing information on good prenatal care, child development, infant stimulation and care, nutrition, modelling parenting skills, and providing information about, as well as facilitating access to, the parent support programs of Better Beginnings for Kingston Children. Participants are parents (usually biological mothers) with at least one child four years of age or younger, as well as expectant mothers. Most participants are low income, white single mothers between the ages of 14 and 35. In 1997, 205 families were visited a total of 3137 times. The frequency of visits ranged from 1 to 59, with an average of 15.3 one-hour visits.

Perinatal and postnatal support is another significant component of the project. This includes a weekly prenatal group consisting of nine sessions, covering healthy lifestyles, nutrition, labour and birth preparation, care of the family postpartum, and baby care and feeding. An optional breastfeeding class is also available. The program is run by a family visitor and a health educator. In 1997, 43 women participated in this program. Prenatal support also includes extensive information dissemination to public and medical practitioners promoting the programs available at Better Beginnings for Kingston Children. Infant groups, consisting of weekly or bi-weekly meetings, give new parents an opportunity for parent-to-parent support, informal education, role modelling, and contact with professional staff. The groups are offered to parents with infants aged 0 to 9 months. In 1997, 70 women participated in the infant group. Parenting workshops, particularly the Nobody's Perfect sessions, have also been offered by this site. Nobody's Perfect is a parenting program designed for single women with low incomes and low literacy levels who are parenting children from 0 to 5 years of age. The series of sessions lasts six weeks, and are two hours in length. In 1997, two Nobody's Perfect series were run and a total of 22 parents attended.

Child care provision is another important component of Better Beginnings programming at this site. This includes child care provision during meetings and program participation (in 1997, 105 families used

childcare during meetings or programs for a total of 1694 visits) and parent relief (in 1997, 155 families used parent relief a total of 1538 times). Better Beginnings for Kingston Children also provides child care quality enhancement to existing preschool groups in the community. Child care assistants from Better Beginnings (1.3 FTE) provide extra support to seven different day cares and nurseries in the Better Beginnings community. All work done by the child care assistants must be work enhancing the daily functioning of the program. In 1997, 157 children from the Better Beginnings neighbourhood had child care assistants in their preschool programs.

Additional activities or programs offered at Better Beginnings for Kingston Children include a parent support group (in 1997, 9 women participated a total of 64 times), a drop-in toddler group offered once a week for two hours (in 1997, 47 families participated), eight playgroups offered in four separate locations three times a week (in 1997, a total of 75 families participated with a total of 1632 visits), a one-hour outdoor playgroup offered during the summer in eight local parks (in 1997, 356 children participated a total of 1267 times), a good food box, hot meal program, playground equipment fundraising committee, food buying club, a nutrition newsletter, Christmas referrals, a low income needs coalition, and special events.

At this site, there is only a very modest emphasis on broader community development efforts. In 1997, only 9% of the Better Beginnings core government budget was devoted to community development efforts. As well, there has been very little additional fundraising and expansion of programs and activities beyond the Better Beginnings mandate in Kingston.

## **Ottawa**

One of the guiding philosophies for the South-East Ottawa site has been a holistic and ecological approach to supporting children and families from prenatal to preschool years. There is an emphasis on community development, parent and service provider collaboration, and inter-agency coordination.

Approximately 60% of the Better Beginnings core government budget is devoted to the family visitor program. The emphasis is on providing support and information, linking the parent with necessary resources (e.g., playgroups, therapy, educational institutions), intervention in crisis situations, and on practical/concrete assistance (e.g., accompanying participants to court or the grocery store) and advocacy. Participants include parents with children aged 0 to 5 who live in the Better Beginnings neighbourhood, many of whom receive social assistance. Home visits last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. On average, there are approximately 75-80 active files monthly and between 110-120 families are visited annually.

A playgroup for children aged 0 to 4 and their parents, offered four days a week, is another major component of this site's programming. Approximately 20% of the Better Beginnings core government budget is devoted to this activity. Children have the opportunity to socialize with other children and caregivers, play games, and have snacks. Caregivers are required to supervise the children they bring, in order to encourage interactions between caregiver and child. There is no formal teaching, only needs-based offering of support by staff. Attendance is very high for this group; in 1996-97 over 450 families participated with over 3000 visits by parents and over 6000 visits by children. In 1998, there were 3700 visits by parents and 8000 visits by children.

This site also has a community nurse (.6 FTE) who conducts two morning groups on site (as well as occasional groups off-site) designed to educate family visitors, pregnant women, new mothers, and mothers with young children on health-related topics (e.g., breastfeeding, adjusting to a new lifestyle, self-care, nutrition and care of babies, etc.). She also regularly visits people's homes. The Community Nurse helps people assert their needs in the health care system.

Other activities or programs offered by South-East Ottawa include a mobile toy lending library, subsidizing existing child care in a local nursery school, parent workshops, and respite for parents. Better Beginnings is located in a community house and is very visible in the neighbourhood. The house is open to all residents and is very welcoming in nature. The project also has its own school bus (the magic bus), brightly painted by neighbourhood children, that offers necessary transportation to families in the community. Other community-oriented activities include a clothing exchange, a sewing crafts group, a women's group, and a food buying club.

The project has expanded beyond the Better Beginnings mandate to involve teens in the community. The project was instrumental in the creation of a multi-faceted park in the heart of the Better Beginnings neighbourhood. As well, the project supports the Kids in the Hood program, a weekly drop-in for kids aged 10 to 14. Teens are also involved as volunteers and grants have been received to provide summer employment for anywhere from 1 to 4 teens. The project raises from \$20,000 to \$70,000 annually to fund additional activities.

## **Toronto**

Parents for Better Beginnings believes that the approach to be taken to prevention programming should be ecological and holistic. There is a belief in the capacities of individuals, and that those strengths and capacities should be nurtured and supported in an empowering fashion. Programs should be community-driven, and there is an emphasis on inclusiveness and flexibility.

Over one-half of the Better Beginnings core government budget has been devoted to the community visitor program. The program is modelled upon the Parents Helping Parents program and involves one-to-one visits with expectant moms, and families with children aged 0 to 5. The community visiting team represents West Indian, Black-Canadian, Hispanic, and Southeast Asian cultures. The focus of the intervention involves prenatal and child development information and support, family planning and support, advocacy, referrals, and crisis intervention. Frequency of contact depends upon the age of the child and the wishes of the family. In general, families with children up to 1 year old are supposed to be visited weekly; biweekly visits are intended for 1 to 2 year olds, a visit every three weeks for 2-3 year olds, and a monthly visit for 3-4 year olds. During 1996-97 the active caseload consisted of 151 families with a total of 208 children in the 0-4 age range. Families from 19 ethno-racial groups were visited.

Education and support for parents also constitutes a major component of programming. A perinatal nutrition and support group is offered to pregnant women and their partners, coaches or friends and also to parents/caregivers with infants up to 6 months of age. The group meets weekly for 1 ½ hours, the format is informal and topics covered include nutrition, fetal development, breastfeeding, labour and delivery, exercises, and culture as it relates to pregnancy and parenthood. While the adults participate in this group, their older children take part in a playgroup in an adjacent room. In 1996-97, approximately 50 to 80 adults attended the group. In addition to this group, parenting groups also are available. Different workshops have been offered including You Make the Difference, a parent-child communication program for children who have or are at risk of developing language delays, and Nobody's Perfect, a parent education program for children up to 5 years of age. Less structured and informal groups have also been offered. These different groups typically involve 6-12 adults.

Additional activities and programs include parent relief available two days a week (in 1997, 60 children were registered), playgroups offering structured learning through play activities (approximately 70-110 children have been involved in various playgroups), and a play and learn resource centre open one-half day a week offering a variety of resources to parents of children of all ages (average number of materials loaned per month is approximately 80). Community-oriented activities have included special events,

community clean-up and barbeque, a women s group, Kindergarten registration package, outreach, and community organizing and advocacy.

Parents for Better Beginnings has developed partnerships beyond the scope of the Better Beginnings mandate. They worked on an extensive review process of the local police division, and have partnered with Parks and Recreation and the Housing Authority to provide a youth and community drop-in and community garden. The site also was able to secure funding to run an anti-racism education training program in which project staff, committee members, staff and board members from eight local agencies, and community residents were involved. The project was also successful in fundraising with a private company. That company raised money to send 42 children to a 10-day summer camp and to purchase a school bus for the project. Fundraising efforts also resulted in a nutritional component being added to the perinatal group.

### **Walpole Island**

Two visions guide programming at the Walpole Island site: healthy child development is crucial for the future; and community ownership is critical. The philosophies and values of the Native community, some that differ considerably from non-Native communities, also guide the project. For example, the importance of kinship patterns, group work patterns, and teaching methods that include elders as teachers and involve learning by observation.

Community development and community healing programming constitutes approximately 60% of the Better Beginnings core government budget. Native language instruction is an important component of this type of programming. Two-hour weekly Native language classes are offered to children and adults for approximately 50 weeks of the year. Approximately 30-40 community members attend each class. A Community Outreach Facilitator also visits the playgroup twice a week for 15-minute sessions to teach Ojibway words, stories and songs. In addition to the Native language classes, cultural and community enrichment has also been offered. This has involved Women s Time Out, community enrichment sessions, and Native learning circles and craft teachings. The Native learning circles are offered approximately four times a year, and involve four weekly sessions. Recruiting volunteers has also been an important element of community development. In addition, Better Beginnings produces a Boozhoo Nijjii newsletter, a monthly publication providing information about events/activities and includes Native language content.

Another main component of the project is child and family-focussed programming. Three family support workers conduct home visits and provide other child and family activities and programs through the Parent/Child Support Program and the Bkejwanong Children s Centre. Home visiting constitutes approximately 20% of the Better Beginnings core government budget. The purpose of the home visits is to provide support and resources to expectant mothers and families with young children. No information on the number of families visited, or the number of times visited, is available.

Other family and parent-focussed programming also constitutes approximately 20% of the Better Beginnings core government budget. The family resource drop-in centre runs playgroups, a drop-in day, and parent workshops and information sessions. The playgroups run twice a week, morning and afternoons, and offer structured activities for parents and their preschool children. A drop-in day also runs one day a week and offers a clothing exchange, weighing and measuring of babies, breastfeeding support, a toy lending library, and socialization and networking for mothers, children, and staff. Approximately 30 parents and 20 children participate in both of these activities per month. A monthly parent information session covering topics related to child development and parenting, as well as monthly prenatal nutrition workshops, are also offered. Parent workshops have also been available and have included You Make

the Difference, a parent-child communication program, offered twice per year consisting of 10 weekly 2-hour sessions (no information on number of participants is available) and Nobody's Perfect, a parenting program, consisting of two 6-week sessions per year or one-on-one as requested (approximately 9 adults and 6 children participate).

Other activities and programs offered by Walpole Island Better Beginnings include an outdoor playgroup where children are brought to different parks on the island (offered only during the summer months), and a monthly food box draw for seniors and community members on social assistance. Previously, a monthly community potluck was also run, but was discontinued in 1997 due to lack of interest and cost. The monthly food box draw actually evolved out of the monthly potluck.

At the Walpole Island site, there is very little mention of additional fundraising and only one activity is reported as serving children outside of the mandated 0 to 4 age range: the blanket program, an outdoor playgroup is open to all children, not just those aged 0 to 4.

## **Older Cohort Sites**

### **Cornwall**

Partir d un bon pas values a comprehensive approach to child development. There is a strong emphasis on resident participation and partnerships with different agencies and services. This project strives to facilitate active participation at all levels.

A substantial proportion of the Partir d un bon pas core government budget is devoted to school-based activities including one full-time school/community animators in each of four schools, who provide classroom enrichment in the JK to Grade 2 classes. In addition, there is a fifth school/community animator who floats between two schools. In the four schools, the number of classes enriched range from 4 to 7, and the animators spend equal amounts of time in each class. The school/community animators spend anywhere from one-half to one full day in each classroom per week. The school/community animators help the teachers provide language, cultural and other education activities to the children. Children often work in small groups on these activities, which are designed to improve cognitive and academic functioning, promote social skills and reduce behaviour problems, and enhance French language skills and cultural identity. All children in the class are involved, although additional time is spent with children who are progressing more slowly.

A breakfast program, offered every morning, is also available in the four schools. Approximately one-half of the children in these schools participate in the breakfast program. Homework help and summer tutoring also is provided by Partir d un bon pas; approximately 40 children participate. In addition to these school-based activities, other major activities or services provided by Partir d un bon pas include a toy library, which has approximately 200 members, and holiday programming. A vacation family camp experience is offered to project families during the summer and school breaks and involves approximately 72 families, and a summer playground program operates with approximately 60 participants.

Additional project activities include family visiting, holiday activities (175 participants), playgroups for children, welcome baskets and home visits to new families, and local Francophone initiatives/activities for the community.

Community development has received increasing attention by Partir d un bon pas. The allocation of the Partir d un bon pas core government budget devoted to community development has increased from 17% to 36% over the years. At the Cornwall site, there seems to be a dual emphasis on a concentration of

resources for prevention programming for children aged 4 to 8 and broader community development efforts. In addition, there has been an evolution in Partir d un bon pas toward greater partnerships with other organizations and efforts have been made to provide programming initiatives that fall outside of the Better Beginnings mandate. For example, Partir d un bon pas was instrumental in the creation of the incorporated Community Action Group (CAG) which helps to create prevention initiatives beyond the Better Beginnings mandate (e.g., a youth centre for teens, a municipal skate park for teens, the development of a disposal of toxic waste education program). The CAG is linked with the project but functions as a separate organization with its own board, advisory group and funding sources.. There are also several examples of the Partir d un bon pas s success in securing additional funding for programs outside of their mandate (e.g., \$20,000 annually for a part-time Family Animator position for the Family Animation Centre, currently operated by the CAG; \$50,000 from a corporation for supporting prevention initiatives for teens).

## **Highfield**

The Highfield Community Enrichment Project places considerable value on an ecological approach to child development. There is a philosophy to address a child s major environments: the family, the school, and the community. There is also an emphasis on resident involvement, and a respect for the various ethno-cultural groups represented in the community.

There are two unique programming aspects of this project: the focussing of much of the in-school programming resources directly on the research focal cohort and the creation of a strong relationship with a single school. The boundaries for the school constituted the Better Beginnings community. This relatively small geographic area, having programs and project offices directly on school grounds, and having only one school where programs were initiated were all advantages for developing school-based programming. All programs are provided on school premises. Classroom enrichment was a strong focus at this site: approximately one-third of the Better Beginnings core government budget is devoted to school-based activities. The research focal cohort had educational assistants in the classrooms from JK to grade 2 (currently, the assistants focus exclusively on the JK classes). In JK and SK, two and one-half full-time educational assistants were funded by the Better Beginnings core government budget. At the same time, three full-time teaching assistants were funded by the Board of Education. Thus, all JK and SK classes had an assistant in the classroom full-time, reducing the adult-student ratio to about 1:10. The educational assistants also conducted home visits with the focal cohort families. In grade 1 there were three full-time educational assistants, spending at least one-half of every school day in each of the grade 1 classes. In the summer prior to Grade 2, the role of educational assistant and family visitor were merged into one position child and family enrichment worker. When the focal cohort children were in grade 2, the four enrichment workers spent approximately 15 hours in class that is, approximately one-half of each school day, and the remaining hours were spent in playgroups, parent groups, training parent volunteers as assistants in the classroom, and conducting home visits.

The focal cohort children also received summer enrichment programming for each summer from JK to Grade 2. Approximately 45 children participated each summer in this programming. In addition to the above, another major component of the classroom enrichment was the initiation of the Lion s Quest social skills programming in the classroom when the focal cohort children were in Grade 1. At that time, all teachers were trained in this program, funded by the Better Beginnings core government budget.

Health and nutrition programming also is a strong focus at this site. Initially, this involved a snack program, delivered to all students in the school three times a week. A hot lunch program was added in later years, where hot soup and pasta was available at minimal cost to all students in the school, two times per week. Approximately 100 children take advantage of this service. And, most recently (implemented

in Spring 1998), a breakfast program has been added.

In addition to all of the above activities, programs for parents and children also constitute approximately one-third of the Better Beginnings core government budget. This includes a parent-child drop-in for children aged 0 to 4, which operates four mornings a week and is usually full to capacity (30+ children), parent relief (one morning a week), before and after school programs, operated every morning and afternoon for up to 30 children, a toy lending library (200+ families registered), and programs during school breaks and summer holidays that are usually filled to capacity.

Additional program activities include home visiting, professional development activities for teachers, educational activities about nutrition and healthy eating, physical fitness activities for the children in the school (e.g., having a physical fitness entertainer come for the day), playgroups for children, parent groups, ethno-cultural activities, community celebrations, neighbourhood safety activities, and a number of smaller programs for children and parents that responded to the community's wishes (e.g., fitness classes for parents, ballet classes for children, bus trips to the US).

At the Highfield site, the project has placed considerable emphasis on concentrating programming resources on the focal cohort children. Comparatively, less emphasis has been placed on broader community development efforts and resident participation/ownership in project governance. In addition, the project has been successful in building a very strong partnership with its local school, as well as with other agencies serving the community. The project also has been involved with initiatives outside of the Better Beginnings mandate. They have participated with eight other local agencies in securing a \$40,000 grant for developing a coordinated community service initiative, and have collaborated with other agencies in the Brighter Futures initiative. As well, they have participated in the Community Action Program for Children to secure funding from the city with over 20 partner agencies that has led to per annum funding of about \$180,000 for city agencies. In addition, they have been involved with additional fund raising to provide programming that falls outside the original mandate. For example, in order to provide nutrition programming to all students in the school, additional funds and donations have been sought. The project also received a grant from the Children's Aid Foundation to provide a recreation program for pre-teens. Many of these additional resources have been invested in additional programming for the school population.

## **Sudbury**

The Better Beginnings site in Sudbury strives to promote a healthy environment for families. They place a very strong emphasis on community involvement and ownership in the project, and in building community leadership. Their philosophy is to provide integrated and universal services to all groups within the community.

More than one-half of Sudbury's Better Beginnings core government budget is devoted to before and after school and holiday programs. The programs include cooperative games, craft activities, outings, and the provision of nutritious snacks. The before school programs operate in four schools every morning from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and are very well attended, with approximately 200 children participating. The after-school programs, in three separate low-cost locations in the community (e.g., a church basement), each have approximately 30 participants a day. The summer recreation program is in three locations and attracts approximately 100 children per day. The focus on broader community development efforts in this project is also very strong. Community kitchens, community gardens, environmental enhancement, as well as other community initiatives are all components of this focus. The site also strongly encourages resident involvement in project organization and management. In fact, the management board for the Better Beginnings project is now composed solely of community residents.

At the Sudbury site, the before-school program is the main school-based activity. Other school-based programs have much less concentration of programming resources. Only 8% of the Better Beginnings core government budget is devoted to additional school programming. These additional school-based programs include a peaceful playground program, a Native cultural program and a multi-cultural program in Francophone schools. The peaceful playground program is devoted to the prevention of bullying and aggressive behaviour and is run by part-time Better Beginnings staff members during school hours. The Native cultural program, run by a full-time Better Beginnings Native community worker, focuses on teaching Native children traditional stories and doing traditional crafts. The multicultural program, operated informally by a part-time Better Beginnings staff person, focuses on teaching children positive aspects of other cultures. Parent and child-based programs including a parent and tot drop-in, organized parenting workshops, play group activities, and family visiting are also provided.

At the Sudbury site, there is a comparatively modest concentration of programming resources on prevention programs for children aged 4 to 8. The evolution of the project has progressed toward greater community ownership, broader community development efforts, and securing additional funds for programs and activities that fall outside of the Better Beginnings mandate. To this end, the project has been very successful in raising additional money through its own incorporated Education Fund. The Education Fund raises more than \$100,000 annually. Because of these additional funds, several self-sustaining projects have been created including a community economic development project and Myths and Mirrors, a community arts program.

## **PROGRAMMING PROFILE DIFFERENCES AMONG SITES**

### **Younger Cohort Sites**

The Kingston, Ottawa and Toronto younger cohort demonstration sites have somewhat similar programming profiles in terms of their investment of over half of their base government funding in family/home visitor programs as well as by their investments in child care and playgroup supports. However, within these general similarities, are important variations in how each of these three sites implements these activities which could affect program outcomes. Kingston is unique in investing almost all of its programming efforts directly into family visitor, perinatal and postnatal support and child care programming. Toronto and Ottawa have greater investments in programming activities which fall outside of their government mandate.

The Guelph and Walpole Island younger cohort sites present very different programming profiles. Guelph has a very high level of diversity in its reported programming activities. It devoted about half as much of its core government budget to family visiting as the above younger cohort sites and has more variety in its programming strategies for preschoolers and children. Community development as a core project and program development process has been strongly emphasized at Guelph and there has been substantial investments in broader community development efforts and programming beyond their government mandate. There has also been a high emphasis on local leadership development as a prevention vehicle. Walpole Island invested about 60% of their base budget in community development and community healing activities. They also reported very little activity outside of their government mandate.

### **Older Cohort Sites**

There are substantial programming differences across the three older cohort demonstration sites. Cornwall had a substantial investment in in-school programming activities including classroom enrichment, homework help and a breakfast program. Cornwall also has been increasingly successful in its broader

community development efforts including many activities beyond their core mandate. Highfield is unique in concentrating a significant proportion of their programming resources directly on the children in the research cohort for the duration of the demonstration period and by focussing most of their programming around a single host school. They had the highest investment in classroom enrichment activities and all of their programming took place on the school premises. Even additional resources raised by Highfield went in good measure to support additional in-school programming. Sudbury had comparatively very little classroom enrichment activities and has been quite successful in raising money to support activities beyond their core mandate. It had the lowest proportion of its programming resources focussed on the 4 to 8 age group among the other older cohort sites.

*It is clear that there is substantial variation in programming attributes across these demonstration sites. While there are similarities in broad emphases across some younger cohort sites, it will be important to consider each site's outcomes in light of its particular programming investments, development emphases and community context.*

## **CHANGES IN PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES OVER TIME**

While many programs and activities remained essentially the same over the first years of the project, several changes occurred: some programs were discontinued, others were introduced, and many were changed to better meet the needs of the community. The following describes some of the key changes that occurred in programming and offers some explanations for their occurrence.

### **Greater Focus on Outreach and Activism**

Over the years, the nature of community development, as well as its breadth, underwent change. There was much greater focus on reaching out to community members and on getting residents involved in activism and advocacy activities.

A change in programs and activities included increased community outreach to the broader community beyond the [Better Beginnings] neighbourhood. The development of the Employment Training Program is an example of a program that was started by residents, and which reaches and includes residents who had no involvement or limited involvement in the project before. Another trend that can be observed is an increase in neighbourhood outreach and activism by neighbourhood residents and project staff beyond their own neighbourhood and into the wider community.

During the last several years there has been an increase in the amount of outreach, presentations, and activism by both community residents and project staff. . . . In 1997, there were seven different presentations to politicians, including Ministry of Community and Social Service officials, ministers and deputy ministers, MPPs, and a policy forum at Queen's Park.

### **Re-focus on Mandated Child Group**

The increased emphasis on community outreach and activism, coupled with the desire to help parents, appeared to reduce, to some extent, the sites' original focus on children. Consequently, a number of projects made an effort to re-focus their programming and activities on children within the age group that they had been mandated to serve.

The other thing that needed to happen was that we need to . . . re-clarify our focus and what we're funded for. We're funded for young children . . . [;] we were drifting into [other] areas . . . but it's not what we are funded for. And the message that we're getting from the Ministry was very clearly that we need to make sure that we're not drifting into other areas . . . . [When] it comes down to it . . . you have to make some choices.

### **Provision of More Parenting Groups and Corresponding Playgroups**

At least two of the younger cohort sites experienced an increased demand for parenting groups and workshops. This increased demand was attributed, at least in part, to parents becoming more vocal and confident in expressing their needs.

[The provision of more parenting groups and corresponding playgroups with a child development focus was one of] the major changes in Better Beginnings' approach to prevention. . . . some cultures have been more vocal about their desire for parenting groups. . . . People begin to maybe open up more about their needs around parenting; whereas I think when we started here nobody was working with this age group, except in daycares .

An increase in the number of parenting workshops came about because of the expressed needs by parents for learning and support around parenting issues. The Coordinator notes that this was a readiness issue. Early in the project, parents were hesitant to talk about their struggles with parenting. Over the past year, parents were ready to take the risk to talk about more painful issues. . . . Consequently, the last year (1997) saw a dramatic increase in the number of workshops available for parents.

### **Programming for a Wider Age Range**

The original Better Beginnings mandate called for projects to focus on children from either 0 to 4 years of age or 4 to 8 years of age. Several of the projects found it difficult to limit their programs to these age groups; if they were to engage in true community development, they felt they needed to provide activities and programs for older children and youth as well. Consequently, a number of project sites looked for ways to provide programs and activities for children outside the mandated age groups.

With the help of other community organizations, a karate program was started in the neighbourhood for children and youth over 5. . . . The young women's group was started by a group of teen women who wanted to meet to talk about issues that were meaningful and relevant to their lives, and consequently became a scheduled program activity. These new programs have come about as a result of the staff and residents identifying needs for children and youth and developing a program to meet those needs. . . . Inclusivity of all neighbourhood residents in the project, and not only children under 5, has always been a guiding principle of the project.

### **Increased Participation by Culturally Diverse Groups**

With outreach increasing in many of the communities, more residents from various cultures were coming into contact with Better Beginnings projects. This created a demand for programs geared to the language and culture of these individuals and groups.

A very significant change in programs has been an increased response to cultural groups living in the neighbourhood. This has been reflected in the creation of programs for parents and children from different cultural backgrounds; for example, Friends Circle for Chinese-speaking parents, Ban Viet for Vietnamese-speaking parents, and the El Grupos Las Alegres for Spanish-speaking parents. The development of culturally specific groups for Vietnamese-, Chinese- and Spanish-speaking families developed out of a need to link home-visited families to other programs and to each other for peer support, and to maintain contact with families after they were no longer receiving home visits (Program Summary, April 95 Sept. 95). These parents were also expressing a need for informal opportunities to learn everyday English that was accessible and located in the neighbourhood.

### **Lack of Demand, Unsuccessful Programs**

Each of the Better Beginnings sites experienced its share of programs that were discontinued for one reason or another. In many instances, the programs were discontinued because they did not attract many participants; in some cases, it was decided that the programs could not be effectively implemented due to insufficient resources or staff training.

## **PROGRAM INFLUENCES**

### **The Impact of Culture and Ethnicity**

Culture and ethnicity were fundamental considerations in many of the Better Beginnings sites, and had a profound influence on the kinds of programs developed. In the Highfield and Toronto Better Beginnings sites, for example, program developers had to tailor programs to communities in which residents spoke many different languages and came from a wide range of countries and cultures that inevitably had different ways of looking at issues such as child-rearing and the role of women. In the Sudbury site, the primary elements in the ethnic and cultural mix were Native, anglophone, and francophone. The Cornwall project, while dealing with a cultural context that was somewhat more homogeneous in that most residents spoke the same language (French), had to take into consideration the fact that francophones are a minority language group in the province. The Walpole Island site also provided some challenges to program developers because of the different traditions and cultural expectations of the Native residents at the site.

Cultural considerations influenced a number of aspects of the programs:

#### **" Who provided the program services**

The individuals providing services or coordinating activities had to be sensitive to the needs of the cultural groups with whom they worked, and preferably would be able to speak to program participants in their own language. For this reason, a number of the sites hired ethnically diverse individuals as front-line staff.

#### **" The importance of language in programming**

A number of the projects supported residents and their children in learning English; for example, by providing childcare for parents taking ESL classes or by providing classroom assistants to help children with their reading. At the same time, sites tried to reach out to the various cultures in their communities

by providing written materials and programs in their own language or by having interpreters available for meetings and programs.

" **Programs that Focused on Developing and Sustaining Cultural Identity**

Several programs were developed to appeal to community members within a specific culture and to enhance cultural identity. These included programs such as the playgroup that centred on East Indian dance, the summer camping program that featured Native culture, and the resource and toy library that provided a wide variety of French games, books, and videos for the francophone community. Such measures were especially important at the Walpole Island site, where programs such as Community Enrichment Sessions, Native Language Classes, and Native Learning Circles were developed to aid in/contribute to the survival of the Native traditions.

" **Programs that promote positive cultural relations and reduce racism**

Several sites developed programs to promote positive relations among cultural and ethnic groups by bringing them together for celebrations and cultural events, by educating school children about cultural groups in their community, and by providing anti-racism training and events.

**Government and the Better Beginnings Model**

The government representatives have been active in fulfilling their responsibility to ensure that the Better Beginnings model was implemented as planned. Their actions in this regard, however, were at times seen by the various sites as being unnecessarily controlling and intrusive. One of the key features of the Better Beginnings initiative from the outset was that the individual projects would be truly community-based that members of the community, working as partners with local service providers, would decide what kinds of programs would be developed in their communities. When government representatives attempted to influence the kinds of programs that were developed, or who the programs would be offered to, in an attempt to ensure that the basic principles of the Better Beginnings model were being adhered to, this was often seen as contrary to the principle of community ownership of programs.

The tension between government influence and community control was evident in a number of areas:

" **Programs for children outside the mandated age group**

The government stipulated that 85 percent of all funding in each of the project communities be directly focused on programs and activities for families of children within a specified age range (either 0 to 4 or 4 to 8 years of age). A number of communities, however, felt the need to provide programs for children in other age groups as well. This was resolved, to some extent, by these communities seeking funding for such programs from agencies outside of Better Beginnings. Nevertheless, government influence did, as one report put it, "force the community away from some of its priorities."

" **Primary health care**

As part of Better Beginnings programming, some of the sites wanted to provide primary health care (i.e., medical services delivered by a doctor or nurse) in the neighbourhood. Because this kind of service was felt to be more treatment-oriented than preventive, funding by Better Beginnings was not allowed. One community resolved this by finding alternative funding for a satellite community health centre in the neighbourhood.

" **The pace of program hiring and development**

A number of the communities felt pressured by government deadlines to recruit neighbourhood participants, design programs, and hire staff. For example, all sites were to have prepared their program plans and designs for the government early in 1992 in order to receive permanent funding. Many of the sites felt rushed in this process. As one site report described the situation:

This meant being able to define clearly what programs were being offered. While on the one hand, this gave the site a push to come to decisions around programming, personnel believed decisions were made under a time constraint with less reflection and consultation than desired.

" **Program staffing and operations**

Government representatives made a number of specific program-related recommendations that at times did not sit well with project members. For example, at one site they made recommendations about the number of hours per week that family visitors should spend with each family, the hiring of a community developer rather than having community development be a part of every staff member's job description, and the salary levels of family visitors. Site personnel considered this to be overly intrusive in a domain that should have been under their control.

Disagreements between sites and government representatives were almost invariably worked out through a process of negotiation, which left both sides reasonably satisfied, despite the fact that there remained, at times, a residue of confusion or discontent. One site report described the process of developing a program model at their site in the following way:

From the experience of developing the program model in this project, it seems clear that the government and project participants had different expectations and interpretations about how they would develop prevention programs. This resulted in a process of negotiation which was arduous and frustrating at times, but eventually led to a program plan that had widespread approval among project participants and which the government could eagerly support.

**Active Leadership**

The importance of identifying and supporting credible local leadership is highlighted in the literature on project/program creation and replication (Commins & Elias, 1991; Dryfoos, 1993). A consistent finding from the project/program development research is the pivotal role that project coordinators play not only in orchestrating project evolution, but in shaping its basic characteristics.

A little talked about aspect of Better Beginnings, Better Futures project development is the determining influence of the initial project coordinator at many demonstration sites. The hiring of the project coordinator is linked repeatedly in site reports with the beginning of rapid project development. In addition, it is clear that the personality, priorities, values and ways of working of the project coordinator coloured many core aspects of project development. For example, at the Guelph site, the Project Coordinator's strong valuing of community development and empowering resident participation undoubtedly contributed to these being dominant organizational themes. In Sudbury, the project coordinator's commitment to alternative approaches to project organization and management was a basic element in this site's having the clearest articulation of these organizational traits of all the demonstration sites. Reports from Ottawa credit the project manager with a dominant influence over their style of

management.

Executive directors from host agencies have also been influential champions and supporters at several sites. For example, in Guelph the executive director of a large public agency is one of the founders of the project, serves on its steering committee and is a powerful champion for the project within his own agency and the broader community. In Kingston, the host executive director assumed direct responsibility for supervising project staff during a particularly difficult time for the project.

### **Selecting and Negotiating Host Settings**

Not every organization nor every neighbourhood is an appropriate host for a new approach to helping children and families. The general lesson is that innovative projects do not prosper in hostile environments. Investments in selecting a welcoming setting, in creating receptive conditions for the initiative as well as in sustaining this support over time are critical components of sound program creation and dissemination strategies (Schorr, 1997).

Better Beginnings, Better Futures has been blessed with markedly positive and productive relations between the projects and their host organizations at six of the seven demonstration sites. It is particularly encouraging that none of the sites experienced the dramatic transformations in how they work once demonstration project funding ended that is so common in the literature. However, it is too soon to understand what the long term influences of the host organizations will be, particularly when core leadership in the projects and host organizations move on.

The Better Beginnings, Better Futures experience confirms the advantages of selecting host organizations with mandates and operating procedures similar to those anticipated for the demonstration project. This demonstration project also supports choosing hosts with good relations with other service organizations and with the potential to be accepted by community residents. It also is important to be clear in the beginning about how much independence the project will require in its work, how this will be achieved, and whether the long-term goal is integration with the host agency or some other outcome. Letters of agreement between the project, its host and, perhaps, funders can help to avoid complications.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

In attempting to meet the considerable challenges to the development and implementation of high quality prevention programs for their communities, project teams learned a number of lessons about strategies that were helpful in enabling them to develop the kinds of programs their communities needed:

### **Programming**

- " Programs must be accessible, well-promoted and visible in the community.
- " Programs that are offered free of charge, and without the requirement of any formal commitments from parents or children, result in a more spontaneous, active and pleasurable participation.
- " Families prefer environments that are cosy and home-like to ones that are more "agency"-like.
- " Tangible markers of change, such as the building of a park or playground, provide project participants with a visible symbol of the changes that can be made in their communities.
- " By incorporating principles of self-help and adult learning into prevention programs, the residents are encouraged to become self-reliant.
- " Prevention efforts should focus on the family rather than on specific high-risk individuals. This approach avoids the stigmatization of individuals and strengthens the family unit while

- supporting the parents.
- " Constant community outreach is essential in order to reach isolated families and maintain participation levels.

### **Connections with Other Service Providers and Agencies**

- " By working collaboratively with other agencies in the community, Better Beginnings can gain access to physical and human resources that would not be available to the project on its own.
- " Ongoing communication with government representatives is necessary in order to build a supportive relationship with government and to convey to them the needs of the project.
- " Paying attention to the political context and advocacy is also important to the making of long-term changes in the community. However, this process can be time-consuming and controversial because some people feel that it diverts a lot of energy that could be devoted to other programs for the community.

### **Staffing Issues**

- " Community workers are an important link between community residents and the project.
- " Staff who are familiar with cultural groups in the community and can speak their language are needed in order to provide programs that are sensitive to the needs of those groups.
- " Staff retreats and the use of external consultants have been effective strategies for team-building and for problem solving regarding programming issues.
- " Consistency of program staff, schedules and location is important in maintaining high rates of participation. This enables participants to form a connection with the staff and the program.

### **Funding Issues**

- " Limits to funding require that projects prioritize which programs are most crucial and needed by the community, and acknowledge that not all of the community's needs can be emphasized at all times.
- " Secure funding is necessary to the planning and implementation of high quality prevention programs.