

# Lessons from Others: Evidence based results for effective parent engagement practise

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# From Deficits to Strengths

- Needs assessments completed, labelled “at risk”
- Professionals came in to fix the problems
- Some families able to make changes despite the system
- Deficit-based approaches have been shown to be ineffective and sometimes even worsen behaviour
- Research shows that strength based approaches work and are sustainable

# CHANCES

- Non profit organization, \$4 M budget, 135 staff
- Contributes to the well being of children and their families from conception to age 11 years
- Six Integrated program streams from prenatal to after school
- Great support from Wallace and Margaret McCain Family Foundation to try new approaches

# Strength based Culture

In all aspects:

- children and parents
- Staff, among each other and with supervisors
- Executive Director models the behaviour
- Board of Directors
- Community networks

# Best Start

- Province wide
- Intensive screening and assessment of all new born babies
- in home visiting
- Targets vulnerable children from birth to 36 months and their parents
- Goal is to enhance the capacity of parents to parent effectively

# The Approach

- Relationships are key
- Assess strengths, then build on them
- Find good, even in the worst situation
- Identifies, often for the first time, the positive aspects that already exist
- Goals established with parents
- Asking the right questions

# Best Start Families profile

- Best Start mothers are:
- Poor - 80% receive income support, EI, family
- Young – 44% are under the age of 22
- Lone parents – 70% are single
- Not well educated – 30% not completed high school and 35% only high school
- Dealing with significant mental health issues – 47% diagnosed with depression/anxiety
- Struggling with drugs and alcohol – 55%
- Reporting sexual abuse – 33%

# One story - Amy

- Pregnant at 13, kicked out of the home
- Involved with drug dealers and addicted at 13
- 4 children, different fathers
- Moved frequently
- Returned to PEI during last pregnancy
- Many challenges – education, drugs, financial
- Now – great parent and working in the trades



# Evaluations

- Child Welfare League of Canada 2005
- Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family, Joseph Hornick, PhD 2006

# Hornick Report

- Approx 90% of clients felt the program helped “somewhat” or “very much” with their ability to deal with stress and problem solving
- Helped “very much”, particularly in dealing with baby’s difficult temperament
- Short term improvements in parents’ knowledge of child development and accurate perception of child’s temperament

# Long term outcomes:

- Increased satisfaction and competency of the parent
- Increased parents' ability to build positive long term social support systems
- Decreased the need for more intrusive intervention by Child Welfare services
- Increased appropriate use of health care services

# CWLC

- “the strength based approach is a significant factor in the success of the program”
- Staff, clients, service providers and Board understood the key concepts of strength based approach and could articulate its value
- The strength based approach has affected the practise of other service providers in a positive manner

# Mount Royal University

## Centre for Child Well-Being

- established to research how to better support children and youth and the adults in their lives
- Incredible Years anti-aggression program for ages 2 – 8, strength based
- Inclusive, so no labelling
- Evaluation of a Headstart program: 80% acceptable behaviour compared to 48% for children not in the program

# Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region

- Strength based approach is a manner of doing things rooted in belief that people have competencies and resources and can use them
- A perspective more than a set of hard and fast rules
- Leads with the positive
- Focus on strengths and assets instead of weaknesses and deficits

# The Last Words - from a Parent

“Best Start helped me find out that what they told me all along was true – I’m a good mom. I have the tools to parent with skill and compassion and the confidence to make good decisions and choices for my daughter now and in the future” (Parent of 19 month old)