

“Knowledge into Action! Effective Practice for Child & Family Services” Conference

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**WHAT WORKS IN EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION:
A CRITICAL RE-CONSIDERATION**

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THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION IS WELL ESTABLISHED

- Too much, too late?
- Starting early in the developmental pathways
- Effective early intervention is a foundation of prevention

THE VALUE OF EARLY INTERVENTION

- The potential to address and overcome problems by well-designed interventions
- The capacity to address a range of problems and factors simultaneously

EFFECTIVE COMPONENTS OF PROGRAMS COMMENCING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

- Multiple components including *both* family support and early education and care
- Duration of at least two years
- Begin prenatally
- Include home visits as a component

A PRIME EXAMPLE:

OUTCOMES OF THE PERRY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

- Higher levels of school achievement and appropriate behaviour at primary school
- More likely to complete secondary schooling and to enter further education
- Lower levels of crime at 15 years of age

OUTCOMES OF THE PERRY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM (cont)

- Fewer arrests at 19 years of age
- Half the rate of arrests at 27 years of age
- Higher levels of income and home ownership

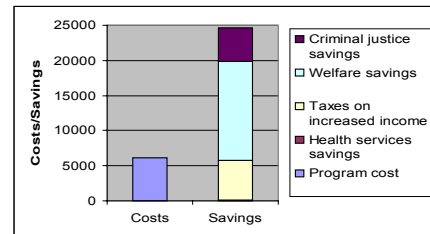
EVIDENCE OF COST EFFECTIVENESS

Early intervention has shown positive cost-benefits

- **The Perry Preschool Project (USA)**
– \$7 savings for each \$1 spent on the project
- **Home visits to high-risk families (Elmira, New York)**
– over \$24,000 savings, at a cost of \$6,000 per child

Savings to Government from Home Visits to High-Risk Families

(Elmira County New York, 1987)

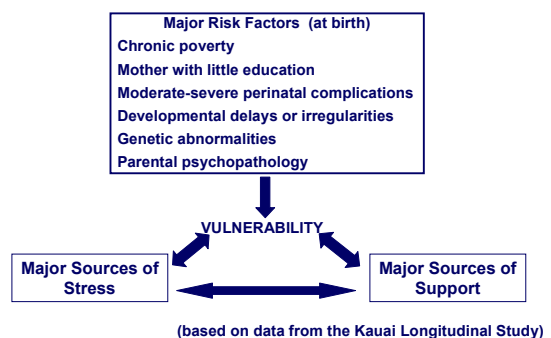


The benefits are in areas other than where costs are incurred

RISK AND RESILIENCE

– UNDERSTANDING THE BALANCE

Interrelations between Risk, Stress, Sources of Support and Coping



KEY ASPECTS OF INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

- **Goals.** Clear statements of goals are essential.
- **Participants.** To avoid stigma, programs should be offered to all families in a certain area while at the same time making special attempts to target families most in need of services.
- **Program content and timing.** Programs need to be dynamic, sensitive to transition times and include ongoing supports with links to other services so that gains can be maintained.

KEY ASPECTS OF INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION (cont)

- **Respect for family needs and values.** Programs should always promote family self-reliance, be sensitive to the needs of minority cultures and encourage families to determine what components best suit their own needs.
- **Cost effectiveness.** Most expensive program components should be reserved for targeted families.

KEY ASPECTS OF INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION (cont)

- **Program staff.** Program personnel should represent the program population in race and gender, have ongoing training, good supervision and support, experience of cooperative team work with staff from existing services and agencies as well as community organisations.
- **Flexibility and accessibility.** This is important to ensure a high uptake of services.

KEY ASPECTS OF INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION (cont)

- **Links to other services.** The ability to connect families to the outside world of services and supports appears to be critical.
- **Evaluation.** Multiple measures, sources and times of evaluation should be part of every program.

KEY ASPECTS OF INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION (cont)

- **Funding and commitment.** Intervention programs require an allocation of sufficient funds for the support and development of families in quality programs, as well as a commitment to the importance of families and the need to sustain effects through links to other services.

SOME RECENT INSIGHTS ABOUT RISK AND RESILIENCE

- Risk is not destiny
- Resilience is not a guarantee
- Risk does not necessarily lead to vulnerability
- Protection does not necessarily result in resilience
- Eliminating risk does not necessarily result in resilience

SOME FURTHER ISSUES

- The limits of “crisis mentality”
- The problems of “risk” and “resilience”
- The contested nature of “early intervention” and “prevention”
- The gulf between “practice” and “theory”
- The limitations of “program” approaches

THREE KEY QUESTIONS TO BE RESOLVED

1. Which problems require action when, over what time-frame, where and with whom?
2. What are the determinants of variation in outcomes and variability of individual development?
3. How are gains to be maintained?

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE?

**Maintain and promote capacity
through
enhanced and re-focused services to
children, families and communities**

Final thoughts ...

The widespread use of over-simple notions about children, of inadequate social action dependent on such notions, and the unwitting employment of self-fulfilling prophecies, need to give way to imaginative, yet independently and austere evaluated experiments which depend only on the assumption that what one does for a child at any age, provided it is maintained, plays a part in shaping his development within the limits imposed by genetic and constitutional factors.

Clarke & Clarke (1976), p.273

Final thoughts ...

Somehow, our nation has to move beyond thinking of the problems of young children as being something someone else fixes at an earlier age or in a different place so that other systems do not have to change. A developmental focus that covers the first 12 to 15 years of life would be a good start.

Farran (2000), p.542