

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wood's Homes - University Of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work Innovative Partnership

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INTRODUCTION

Wood's Homes is a comprehensive community mental health centre for families, children, and adolescents. In operation since 1914, Wood's Homes currently operates in 12 locations in southern Alberta including Calgary, Canmore, Strathmore, and Lethbridge. Families who seek help voluntarily and families who are involved with protective services through a Children's Services Authority are assisted by means of a comprehensive continuum of community outreach, residential, and educational services.

In 2001, Wood's Homes acted on its interests related to continuous improvement and developing its own research capacity by setting up a Research Department. This initiative was supported by our existing partnership with the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work. This partnership is one of several that the Faculty pursues with community collaborators to ensure strong linkages between applied research and service delivery. The focus of Wood's Homes Research Department encompasses research, evaluation, and investigating outcomes within the context of Wood's Homes' programs. This chapter provides an overview of the partnership activity as it relates to an intervention evaluation of the Habitat Program, one of Wood's Homes intensive residential treatment programs.

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

Developing the Partnership

The Habitat Program was initiated in 1999 (Gardiner and Johansson 2002). Habitat offers direct intervention for adolescent boys and their families who have experienced trauma because of domestic violence. These boys often show troublesome behaviours such as degrading attitudes towards women, physical aggression, a limited sense of personal responsibility, and poor self-control. The program was based on the hypothesis that direct intervention targeting domestic violence trauma could be effective in treating adolescent males with conduct difficulties who have been exposed to domestic violence and accompanying maltreatment. The Habitat Program focuses on behavioural changes, while at the same time exploring underlying trauma through family, individual, and group therapy; residential treatment; and an on-site specialized educational program offered in conjunction with the Calgary Board of Education.

There is growing recognition that witnessing domestic violence is a form of child maltreatment, and higher rates of domestic violence are noted in Alberta when compared with other provinces and territories (Statistics Canada 2006). This identification influenced the partnership's decision to choose Habitat for an intervention evaluation.

Wood's Homes and the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work have previous experience with academic/service provider ventures, as well as considerable experience in program evaluations. In 2003, the partners developed a proposal that was accepted for funding by the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare. This evaluation was designed as a way to determine the practicality and effectiveness of treatment efforts. The partnership benefitted from a joint research project completed in 2005 (University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work) that conducted an extensive review of partnerships in nonprofit child and family service organizations in Calgary.

A joint project team was established to guide and monitor the intervention evaluation as it progressed. The collaboration began with a review of relevant partnership literature, which promoted the development of a clear understanding of roles. The Faculty of Social Work was responsible for ensuring that academic standards and rigour were maintained, and for providing consultation on the overall quality, research design, data analysis, documentation, and information dissemination. Wood's Homes was responsible for overall project

management, including financial and reporting aspects. As the project progressed and the collaboration strengthened, a climate of shared responsibility and mutuality was evident.

As the project was wrapping up, a poster presentation was given at the University of Calgary's 2004 Scholarly Exchange Conference. When the project was completed a formal report was submitted to the funder (Lawson, Gardiner, MacLaurin et al. 2006), and project results were disseminated in the Child Welfare League of Canada's publication *Canada's Children* (Lawson, Gardiner, Johansson et al. 2006) as well as within a CWLC Research Brief (Lawson, Gardiner, Johansson et al. 2006). This paper was also presented at the University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work 2008 Research Symposium.

Research Methodology

Study design

The study used a pretest-posttest design comparing an intervention group with a comparison group. The intervention group completed a pretest of all evaluation instruments, a posttest immediately following discharge from the Habitat Program, and a second posttest three months later. A comparison group was recruited from the Wood's Stabilization Program, a very short-term crisis residential service for youth and families (3 to 5 day admission). The comparison group completed the same assessment instruments at the end of the crisis stay, nine months later, and again three months hence.

Research objectives and measures

Measures for each of the five evaluation objectives were selected based on a review of the literature. Quantitative measures demonstrated a clear connection to the objective in question, had been documented in previous research, and had reported adequate reliability and validity. Qualitative measures were adapted from existing semi-structured interview guides.

The intervention evaluation was designed to determine:

1. Did the intervention contribute to a shift in locus of control around violent behaviour for youth? *The Nowicki Strickland Locus of Control Scale* (Nowicki and Strickland 1973) was chosen to examine change over time.
2. Did addressing the underlying trauma contribute to a reduction in the youth's violent and impulsive behaviour? *The Trauma*

Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC) was chosen to explore distress related to previous trauma including witnessing of violence (Briere 1996).

3. Was there an increase in adolescent developmental progress? *The Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale* (CAFAS) was used to assess the youths' degree of impairment in day-to-day functioning due to emotional, behavioural, psychological, psychiatric, and/or substance use problems (Hodges 2004). School attainment was measured by the STAR Reading and Math assessments (Renaissance Learning Inc.).
4. Did the parents develop a greater awareness of the residual effects of domestic violence by the end of intervention? *The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales* (CTS2-CA; Straus et al. 1996) were used to report on parents' behaviour towards each other. A qualitative measure of awareness of the effects of domestic violence was adapted from an existing semi-structured interview guide completed by Salzinger et al. 2002).
5. Did the intervention contribute to an increase in family and community safety after discharge? CAFAS Risk scores were used as a measure of safety. Certain items on the CAFAS when endorsed can indicate that a youth is at risk for suicidal behaviours, harm to self or others, running away, serious mental illness, or serious substance abuse.

Recruitment

A total of 27 male youth, admitted to the Habitat Program following the commencement of the project (January 2004), were eligible for participation in the evaluation intervention group. Fifteen youth and their families who were entering treatment agreed to participate in the research project, while 12 families also entering treatment chose not to participate. Within the initial period of the evaluation, three families chose to end their research project involvement, leaving 12 youth and families as participants.

The comparison group consisted of five youth and their families presenting with unaddressed issues around domestic violence. They were recruited over a one-year period from the Wood's Stabilization Program, a program that provides very brief residential crisis diffusion for youth and families. These families reported a history of domestic violence in the home but were not involved in any treatment related to this presenting concern. The clinician in the Stabilization Program referred suitable families to the Research Team for a recruitment interview. Participating

families gave consent for participation following discharge from the Stabilization Program.

Ethical approval

The study was reviewed by the Wood's Homes Research Advisory Committee, a subcommittee of the organization's Board Quality Improvement Committee, to ensure that the evaluative research met agency requirements for research with children and families. A member of the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work sits on this committee, supporting the research partnership at an advisory level. The study received formal ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary. The ethics application outlined considerations of informed consent, specifically, that participation was voluntary, was not a condition for involvement in treatment, and could end at any time. The small sample size of both the intervention and comparison groups required particular attention to confidentiality and anonymity. Data were reported at an aggregate level only, and reports did not include any identifying or near-identifying information. All participants received a copy of the written description of the intervention evaluation and a copy of the signed written consent.

Data analyses

Quantitative data were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 14 (SPSS V. 14) to conduct univariate and bivariate analyses. Data included demographic child and family variables in addition to scores for each of the measurement scales for each point of collection (pretest, posttest1, posttest2). Descriptive analyses were conducted on the demographic data, which included child age, number of siblings, marital status, family composition, and self-reported socio-economic status. Further analyses tested for significant differences in the mean scores of all measurement scales at pretest, posttest1, and posttest2 for the intervention and comparison groups using a matched pair T-test.

All semi-structured interviews were recorded on audiotape, and then transcribed verbatim. Analysis of the qualitative data was conducted using ATLAS.ti V.5 software. Preliminary thematic coding was conducted by the Wood's Homes Research Department and reviewed by other members of the research team.

Findings

Intervention group / comparison group profiles

The intervention and comparison groups were similar in age, with the majority of youth age 14 at the beginning of the study. The groups also had a similar number of siblings per family. Single parents with lower socio-economic status (parents receiving social assistance) were more prominent in the intervention group; intact families with medium SES (one parent working full time) were more prominent in the comparison group.

Table 8.1. Demographic Information for Intervention and Comparison Groups of Habitat Program

	<i>Intervention Group</i> (n=12)		<i>Comparison Group</i> (n=5)	
	#	%	#	%
Child Age				
13	4	33	2	40
14	6	50	3	60
15	2	17	0	0
Number of Siblings				
No Siblings	2	17	1	20
One Sibling	5	42	2	40
Two Siblings	4	33	2	40
Three Siblings	1	8	0	0
Marital Status				
Married	0	0	2	40
Common-law	0	0	1	20
Separated	3	25	1	20
Divorced	8	67	1	20
Widowed	1	8	0	0
Socio-Economic Status				
Low	11	92	1	20
Medium	1	8	4	80
High	0	0	0	0

Comparison of themes related to demographic information from family interviews

Intervention group. Serious addictions issues were prominent for family members of Habitat youth, along with severe financial stress. Many of the custodial parents identified depression as a hindrance to their ability to provide good parenting and to take responsibility for

their child's current behavioural and emotional difficulties. Overall, these families had more serious and multiple challenges than the families in the comparison group.

Comparison group. The comparison families had less overall reported stress. Addictions issues, financial stress, and Children's Services involvement were not present to the same degree. The primary stress for these families was their sons' troublesome behaviours. All parents expressed continuing concerns about the youth's difficulties in school and behaviour in the community, including alcohol and drug use and difficulty with authority figures. The predominant focus of concern continued to be on the inability of the young person to take responsibility for his maladaptive behaviour.

Evaluation findings

Objective #1. To determine if the intervention contributed to a shift in locus of control concerning violent behaviour for youth.

On the *Nowicki Strickland Locus of Control Scale*, there were no significant differences between pretest and posttest measurements for both the intervention and comparison groups. The treatment intervention did not appear to contribute to any shift in locus of control.

Objective #2. To determine if addressing underlying trauma contributed to a reduction in the youth's violent and impulsive behaviour.

With the *Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC)* there were no significant differences between pre- and posttest measurements for both the intervention and comparison groups. The treatment intervention did not contribute to any apparent reduction in distress related to previous trauma.

Table 8.2. Nowicki Strickland and TSCC Scores for Intervention and Comparison Groups of Habitat Program

Nowicki Strickland Scores	Intervention Group			Comparison Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Mean	25.08	25.17	25.00	23.80	23.80	23.80
Total	12	12	12	5	5	5
	Pre-test to Post-test 1			Pre-test to Post-test 1		
	NS			NS		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2			Pre-test to Post-test 2		
	NS			NS		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2		
	NS			NS		
TSCC	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Mean	1.64	1.64	1.73	0.50	0.75	0.50
Total	11	11	11	4	4	4
	Pre-test to Post-test 1			Pre-test to Post-test 1		
	NS			NS		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2			Pre-test to Post-test 2		
	NS			NS		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2		
	NS			NS		

Objective #3. To determine if there was an increase in adolescent developmental progress at the end of the intervention.

Developmental progress was measured using the *Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale* (CAFAS). There was strong evidence that the treatment intervention contributed to an increase in developmental progress. The initial mean CAFAS score for the intervention group was 165.8. A score in this range indicates that the youth “likely needs intensive treatment, the form of which would be shaped by the presence of risk factors and the resources available within the family and the community (extreme dysfunction)” (Hodges 2004). The mean CAFAS score at discharge was 109.2, which is indicative of “youth who are ready for community-based care as part of a post-treatment plan” (Hodges 2004). This is an average decrease of 56.6 points, and is considered to be clinically meaningful (greater than 20 points difference). A third CAFAS measurement three months post-discharge gave a mean score of 94.2, indicating that the behavioural improvements at discharge as measured by CAFAS were maintained over time.

The youth in the comparison group were functioning better than the intervention group at all stages of the intervention evaluation. The initial mean CAFAS score for the youth in the comparison group was 82.0. A score in this range indicates that the youth “may need additional services beyond outpatient care (moderate dysfunction)” (Hodges 2004). The mean CAFAS score nine months after discharge from the Stabilization Program was 86.0, still in the range of moderate dysfunction. A third CAFAS measurement three months post-discharge resulted in a mean score of 88.0. There was a slight upward trend in scores, with the mean remaining in the “moderate dysfunction” range. This lack of comparability of degree of dysfunction is a limitation of the research study.

School attainment was measured using STAR Reading and Math assessments. For the intervention group, the mean STAR math score at intake was grade 5.2. The mean score after one academic year was grade 7.1, representing an average increase in math skills over one academic year of 1.9 years, or .9 years beyond the expectation for the typical student of one grade level per academic year. The mean STAR reading score at intake was grade 4.9 and the mean score after one academic year was grade 8.7, representing an average increase in reading skills over one academic year of 3.8 years, or 2.8 years beyond expectation. Anecdotal assessments were provided by parents/guardians three months after the youth were discharged from Habitat. All of the youth were maintaining progress in school, with the exception of one youth who had left school and was working in the construction industry.

For the comparison group, the mean math grade level determined during the Stabilization admission was grade 8.1 and the mean reading grade level was grade 8.4, while the mean expected grade level according to chronological age was grade 9.4, indicating a negative difference of 1.3 academic years for math and one academic year for reading. The mean estimated grade level for these youth nine months later, as determined by report cards, was grade 8.6 for math and grade 8.6 for reading, while the expected grade level according to chronological age was grade 10.3, a negative difference of 1.7 academic years for both math and reading.

Three months later, two youth were no longer in school, although they had both obtained full time employment. The mean math and reading grade levels determined by report cards for the three youth who were still in school were grade 9.1 for both math and reading, while the expected grade level for these youth was grade 10.9, a negative difference of 1.8 academic years for both math and reading. The parents of these

youth reported that school attendance and achievement continued to be problematic over the course of the study.

Table 8.3. CAFAS and School Attainment Scores for Intervention and Comparison Groups of Habitat Program

CAFAS Score	Intervention Group			Comparison Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Mean	165.83	109.17	94.17	82.00	86.00	88.00
Total	12	12	12	5	5	5
	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>P</i> <.01			Pre-test to Post-test 1 NS		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>P</i> <.001			Pre-test to Post-test 2 NS		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>P</i> <.05			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 NS		
School Attainment	Intervention Group			Comparison Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Reading Mean	4.86	8.72	NA	8.40	8.64	9.15
Mathematics Mean	5.15	7.14	NA	8.10	8.62	9.10
Total	12	12	12	5	5	5
Reading	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>P</i> <.001			Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>P</i> <.05		
Mathematics	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>P</i> <.001			Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>P</i> <.01		

Objective #4. To determine if the parents developed an awareness of the residual effects of domestic violence at the end of intervention.

The quantitative measurement tool used for this determination was the *Revised Conflict Tactics Scales* (CTS2-CA). There were no significant differences pre- and post-treatment for the intervention group and there was no apparent change using the CRS2-CA with the comparison group over the course of the study.

Table 8.4. Conflict Tactics Scale for Intervention and Comparison Groups of Habitat Program

	<i>Intervention Group</i>			<i>Comparison Group</i>		
Conflict Tactics Scale - 1	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>
Mean	10.33	10.5	10.27	6.00	6.00	6.00
Total	12	12	12	5	5	5
	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	<i>Intervention Group</i>			<i>Comparison Group</i>		
Conflict Tactics Scale - 2	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>
Mean	11.17	11.17	11.09	7.00	7.00	7.00
Total	12	12	12	5	5	5
	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	<i>Intervention Group</i>			<i>Comparison Group</i>		
Conflict Tactics Scale - 3	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>
Mean	5.5	5.42	5.36	5.00	5.00	5.00
Total	12	12	12	5	5	5
	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	<i>Intervention Group</i>			<i>Comparison Group</i>		
Conflict Tactics Scale - 4	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test 1</i>	<i>Post-test 2</i>
Mean	2.33	2.17	2.27	1.40	1.40	1.50
Total	12	12	12	5	5	5
	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		

Semi-structured interviews with families/guardians in the intervention group at intake, discharge, and at follow-up were also used to determine if there was increased awareness of the residual effects of domestic violence. Interviews with the comparison group parents occurred at discharge from the Stabilization Program, nine months later, and again three months later.

The following summary of themes describes a gradually increasing awareness of the residual effects of domestic violence that emerged for the families of youth receiving treatment in the Habitat Program.

Intervention group: first interview (at admission to the program). All parents minimized the effects of domestic violence on their sons' development, citing other reasons for the presence of a conduct disorder, such as a genetic disposition. Trans-generational violence was evident in all stories of family trauma. Conflict between the parental couple was described as frequent (two or more times per week), and this conduct was both verbally and emotionally abusive. The frequency of physical violence steadily increased until the couple no longer lived together. The custodial parent rarely made attempts to limit the youth's contact with the non-custodial parent after the separation, with a theme of appeasement being prominent.

Violence toward the custodial parent and younger siblings by the youth in treatment was another prominent theme in all the family interviews, and was often the trigger for Children's Services to become involved. The custodial parent often relied on the non-custodial parent to help with discipline when the youth was being violent towards other family members. Custodial parents often noted how helpless they felt to make any changes, and how they had become habituated to frequent violence in the home.

Intervention group: post-treatment interview. All parents described greater knowledge of the needs of adolescents related to the residual effects of domestic violence, a belief that they were better able to parent both their child in treatment and his siblings, and a recognition that family therapy contributed to better ways of interacting and setting standards of permissible behaviour.

Intervention group: follow-up interviews (three months post-discharge). Parents reported that they were more proactive in finding an array of supports when violence occurred. All parents reported possessing new skills for managing their younger children, particularly around anger and aggression.

Comparison group: first interview. The themes emerging from the first comparison group family interviews demonstrated little understanding of the effects of domestic violence on child and family development. Violent interactions with partners were described as most often provoked by the recipient. Parents expressed the belief that the youth was the primary creator of his and the family's distress. The youth's biological father was frequently described as having serious addictions issues.

Comparison group: post-treatment interview. The second of the comparison group family interviews held nine months after the youth left the Stabilization Program described the parents' difficulties finding intervention resources to meet their needs and revealed new information about verbal, emotional, and physical abuse.

Comparison group: follow-up interview. The third comparison-group family interviews held three months later described continuing difficulty with their sons' verbal and physical abuse and with progress in school, with no overt connections made between exposure to domestic violence and a youth's acting-out behaviour and school difficulties.

Objective #5. To determine if the treatment intervention contributed to an increase in family and community safety after discharge.

CAFAS endorsed risk scores were used to investigate risk over time. The initial mean number of endorsed risk items for the intervention group was 3.8. This fell to a mean of 1.9 at discharge and to a mean of 1.8 post-discharge. The initial mean number of endorsed risk items for the comparison group was 1.9. This rose slightly to a mean of 2.0 nine months after the youth had left the Stabilization Program and rose again slightly to a mean of 2.1 three months later. Risk factors for the intervention group appeared to lessen during the course of the study, while risk factors for the comparison group remained relatively constant.

Table 8.5. CAFAS Risk Scores for Intervention and Comparison Groups of Habitat Program

CAFAS Risk Score	Intervention Group			Comparison Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Mean	3.83	1.92	1.83	1.80	2.00	2.20
Total	11	11	11	4	4	4
	Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>P</i> <.001			Pre-test to Post-test 1 <i>NS</i>		
	Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>P</i> <.001			Pre-test to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		
	Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>			Post-test 1 to Post-test 2 <i>NS</i>		

Challenges for the Study

Boyd, Einbinder and Rauktis (2007) described a variety of challenges researchers face in residential treatment centres. In particular, they noted that the treatment delivery for youth must be the top priority, and that data collection procedures can become compromised in a setting that offers 24-hour treatment with a number of rotating staff shifts. Ethical, clinical, and political issues can arise in ways that are not seen in research being carried out in more controlled or academic settings.

A variety of other challenges arose over the course of the project. These challenges included the timely recruitment of sufficient participants for both the intervention and comparison sites, recurrent staff turnover, developing effective reporting processes, and competing priorities for the members of the research team.

The first major challenge, and likely the most significant one for the evaluation objectives, was defining a suitable comparison group. There were no programs similar to the Habitat Program that the researchers were aware of, and several ethical issues had to be considered to ensure that all youth and families in need received service. This issue was eventually resolved with the selection of the short-stay crisis Stabilization Program, targeting families who identified domestic violence and conduct issues. However, there was a substantial drop-off in participation rates between the original agreements to take part that occurred when youth left the Stabilization Program and subsequent family contact with the researcher a few days later. Finding an adequate number of comparison group participants was problematic, but of greater concern were the families' stated reasons for dropping out of the study. The stated reasons included safety issues in the family home, conflict between partners about participation, and an unspecified change in interest in participating.

A second major challenge was finding adequate intervention participants. The Habitat Program by design can serve eight youth at one time and treatment takes an average of nine months. Only 12 youth and families agreed to participate in the research project over the two-year period. Working with a large enough sample over a manageable amount of time to produce acceptable levels of results was a significant challenge for this intervention evaluation. The research results ultimately reported to the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare were tentative at best, and only suggestive of an adequate measure of treatment success.

Maintaining program and research staff continuity was another challenging issue. Over the two-year period of the study Habitat experienced changing front-line staff as well as the director, supervisor,

and therapist moving to other programs. The maintenance of program integrity while also completing the work of the evaluation was an ongoing issue. This was particularly evident in the comparison group at the Stabilization Program where the participating families continued to struggle and the benefits of participating in the study were much less directly apparent.

PARTNERSHIP: VIEW OF THE AUTHORS-RESEARCHERS

Wood's Homes and the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary have had a long and multi-faceted relationship. Wood's employs staff trained by the Faculty, and the Faculty includes one person who was once a Wood's employee. The agency's CEO completed her Ph.D. with the faculty and teaches as an adjunct professor. A group of Wood's clinicians teaches a Faculty of Social Work online course on Children's Mental Health every year. A Faculty member sits on the Wood's Research Advisory committee.

From its earliest beginnings, this study was viewed by the agency leadership as having significant benefits to the ongoing partnership with the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work, to the overall development of the Wood's Homes Research Department, and to the service mandate of the Habitat Program. The Faculty was enthusiastic about being involved in another opportunity to blend theoretical and applied research practices for the ultimate benefit of at-risk youth and their families.

A research team was formed to prepare the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare research grant application. This team included a Faculty of Social Work faculty member, the Research Department's associate director, and the director, supervisor, and therapist with the Habitat Program. The team addressed a variety of issues surrounding the viability of taking on this project, including addressing issues that might impact service delivery and clarifying goals and objectives for the study.

Prior to completing the funding proposal, several meetings were held to elicit feedback from the entire Habitat treatment team. The themes addressed in these meetings included the benefits of a research study to the service offered by the program, the benefits of working together with other stakeholders, possible impacts on service delivery, and clarity about the operations of the partnership. The feedback received following these planning meetings included high satisfaction from the treatment team, who expressed appreciation for being involved in the process and a strong

commitment to the successful implementation of the project. News of the successful grant and the formation of the research partnership were celebrated across the organization as a significant achievement. The team continued to meet over the course of the project to review progress and make decisions about how the data would be interpreted and reported, and reconvened to prepare this chapter.

It became evident as the research study began to evolve that further attention was needed at the comparison site, the Stabilization Program. Communication issues were apparent and very few comparison families were being identified and recruited. Efforts to introduce and involve the entire staff team at the Habitat Program initially, which had created a strong sense of benefit to the service delivery before start-up, had been missing with the Stabilization staff group. There was a need to focus on consensus, communication, and “buy-in.” The research team belatedly developed a similar process, working with the Stabilization leadership, clinical staff, and team members to generate meaningful conversations about the goals and objectives of the project and the important role of the comparison group.

The Habitat Program’s supervisor was viewed as a central facilitator of the research process as it unfolded. He was viewed as the link between the research and service delivery teams. The supervisor made use of individual supervision and weekly team meetings to ensure that the research work was in the forefront for the staff group and that any issues of concern were being promptly addressed. The program therapist was viewed as the link between the research team and the client families. She supported families to continue with the data collection after discharge and responded to all questions and concerns promptly and comprehensively. The Wood’s Research Department was able to employ a Ph.D. candidate part-time who contributed research expertise to the project while gaining further skills and experience. As challenges arose during the time period of data collection, all research team members were called upon to contribute effort and expertise to keep the project on track. The project was regularly reviewed by the agency’s Research Advisory Committee to assist with challenges as they arose.

Benefits

There were many benefits for Wood’s Homes in carrying out this research project in partnership with the Faculty of Social Work. Both the process and the findings informed service delivery and helped to demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatment. The research contributed

to the development of a formal treatment model and resulted in the completion of a formal program evaluation. The study also helped to provide additional staffing resources and a foundation for an ongoing agency research agenda. As with any major endeavour, agency staff, by choosing to attempt a new and complex project, were “stretched” and learned a multitude of new skills.

The benefits of participation in the research partnership to the Faculty of Social Work were also significant. A pillar of the Faculty’s service delivery philosophy is “working with community.” There is an expectation that faculty members contribute to community work in the social service field. This project contributed to the development of further links between research and practice in the field of service to children and families. A faculty member provided training to Wood’s staff on the use of qualitative analysis tools.

The project also created mutual benefit for the partners. There was important relationship building between university and agency, new publishing and presentation opportunities became available, and the partners were able to take advantage of opportunities for networking across Canada. The partnership has continued with additional joint projects. Wood’s Homes and the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Social Work are involved in operationalizing the National Outcomes Matrix for outcomes reporting of interventions for children at risk. This partnership is also involved with “Calgary Youth, Health and the Street,” a community based research initiative funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and led by Worthington and MacLaurin at the University of Calgary, along with AIDS Calgary and other street youth service agencies in Calgary. This study was designed to describe the spectrum of street-involved youth in Calgary and to explore variation among these different sub-populations in terms of HIV and health risks, coping mechanisms and service needs in addition to enhancing existing services for street youth by providing information that was useful to youth service organizations in service planning. This study was conducted between 2004 and 2007.

A new funded research project initiated in 2009 is “Enhancement of Transitional Housing Programs for Street-Involved Youth Through the Application of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy to Strengthen Resilience,” which was also funded by CIHR. This study is led by McCay of Ryerson University and a team of University and service researchers, to be conducted in three Canadian locations between 2009 and 2012.

The Habitat study highlighted measures that proved useful for noting positive change for the study population in the areas of development, family awareness and risk, strengthening the hypothesis of connections among domestic violence, child maltreatment, and conduct disorder. The study also highlighted measures that, while having initial promise, did not capture positive or negative change. The overall results clarified our understanding of families struggling with domestic violence. The intervention evaluation strengthened the historical partnership, resulting in other joint research initiatives.

Conclusion

The research partnership between Wood's Homes and the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work was developed to carry out an intervention evaluation of a promising program that provides treatment to youth and their families who are adversely affected by domestic violence. Completion of the project led to increased service capacity to clients, increased capacity for research activities at Wood's Homes, and increased opportunities for applied research for the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work. The lessons learned for all participants continue to support the partnership in acquiring future funding opportunities to carry out projects that bring together each member's skills and talents.

PARTNERSHIP: A PRACTITIONER'S POINT OF VIEW

Janet McFarlane

I felt honoured when I first received an invitation to publish a response to the Research-Community Partnership in Child Welfare, Wood's Homes Habitat Program project. After reading through the viewpoint of the author-researchers, however, I was somewhat perplexed with the contextual omissions. After much reflection, I began to appreciate the difficulty organizations may have in seeing the connections to the contextual elements when the tasks of their work are so engrained in workplace culture. It became clear that my job was not to comment on the research project itself, but to find a way to describe for the reader a culture and philosophy that is not a formula or methodology, but a way of leading. What I have to share has little to do with research and everything to do with research-community partnership success.

This response will highlight three contextual elements within the Wood's Homes / University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work Innovative Partnership - Habitat Evaluation. From my viewpoint, these help to strengthen research capacity with regard to child welfare work in the community and to make it a success.

Philosophical Joining

Wood's Homes philosophy of "never giving up and never saying no" is much more than a tag line, it is the foundation from which all services and relationships are developed. This is important to understand because it is a primary element that contributes to a successful partnership. This philosophy is about perseverance and commitment, no matter how hard the work becomes. So when Wood's Homes had the opportunity to work with a University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work researcher who had been a Wood's Homes staff member, there was an implicit understanding by the entire research project team of how difficult the clinical work can be with the population being served by the Habitat program. Equally important was the mutual understanding of what it means to stick with a project through to the end. In this case, there was a level of like-mindedness that transcended mutual research interest.

Partnership Excellence

Wood's Homes has been serving the Calgary community in partnership for over 90 years and has celebrated many partnership successes. The agency has also learned much from mistakes in this area. It was from these lessons learned that a comprehensive set of partnership policies and guidelines have been developed to guide the agency's partnership work. Partnership work at Wood's Homes is overseen by a standing committee created by the agency to review all partnerships on a quarterly basis. The intent of the committee is to ensure that no matter how long the partnership has been in existence, the criteria for a successful partnership continue to be met. These policies and guidelines are available on Wood's Homes website at www.woodshomes.ca.

Partnerships are a complex business, with legal, ethical, financial, and philosophical ramifications. The depth of partnership experience and understanding that both Wood's Homes and the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work brought to the project is another crucial element contributing to the success of this research-community partnership.

The historical layers of connection and relationship, although somewhat downplayed within the text of this chapter, are of significance when looking at the success of this partnership project. The web of connections is not always apparent on the surface, but it is very beneficial to the success of the project when they are presented and recognized.

Leadership

The message the leaders of an organization impart to staff when embarking upon a research partnership is a third important contextual element. The Chief Executive Officer's mantra in the leadership arena is three-fold: humbly show up, speak the truth with compassion, and give up trying to control the outcome. As I read through this chapter's sections on the nature of the partnership, challenges, and benefits, I can see this philosophy come alive through the team's reflection of their experience. A leadership philosophy assists in guiding researchers and practitioners. It sets the stage for how organizations celebrate and communicate their successes, and it is a road map when a study's design falls short or experiences a setback. It is what helps to create the space for a regrouping, an apology, a laugh, a cry, and hopefully the encouragement to continue.

Conclusion

When considering the implementation of a research-community partnership, particularly in the child welfare area, there is much to strategize about and much to be learned from others' experiences, such as the Habitat project's challenges and successes. However, from my viewpoint, the complexity of the many contextual factors at play is important to acknowledge. Once identified, they become part of the research, part of what works or does not work, part of sharing aspects that research proposals do not consider and, ultimately, part of strengthening research capacity in child welfare within the mobilized community.

The Wood's Homes Habitat project was a complex undertaking for many reasons: the small number of families the project had to work with in the intervention and comparison groups, the nature of the population, and the practice complexities of domestic violence. Over the last number of years the child welfare field has made advances in the research literature on the effects of domestic violence, yet there is little evaluation research to support what aspects of intervention assist in mediating the effects, particularly within residential settings. The evaluation findings of this study begin to support an evidence base for residential treatment

interventions that have promising service delivery outcomes for our community-based child welfare programs. Of equal importance is the foundation this research partnership has created for potential future funding opportunities for continued Research-Community Partnerships in the area of child maltreatment and domestic violence.

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