

GRADE 12

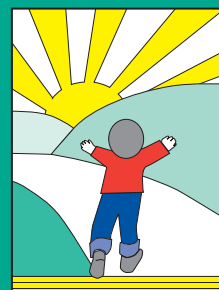


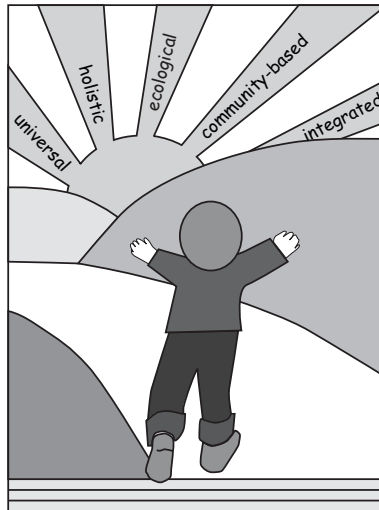
# INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

## Better Beginnings, Better Futures

AN EFFECTIVE, AFFORDABLE, AND COST-SAVING  
PREVENTION PROJECT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

HIGHLIGHTS OF BETTER BEGINNINGS, BETTER FUTURES  
RESEARCH FINDINGS AT **GRADE 12**





## IMPORTANT TERMS RELATED TO THE BETTER BEGINNINGS PROJECT

### BETTER BEGINNINGS IS...

#### **Universal**

Programs are made available to all children living in the community, not just those singled out as being most in need or at risk. An advantage of universality is that it avoids drawing unwanted attention to individual young people.

#### **Holistic or Comprehensive**

The programs aim to support all aspects of the young person's development and well-being (including relationships, feelings, skills, actions, and physical health), not just one or two aspects (such as physical health or IQ).

#### **Ecological**

The approach pays attention to the whole environment surrounding the young person.

#### **Community-Based**

Parents and volunteers in the neighbourhood are invited to participate in planning and evaluation of programs which meet the needs of their community. This ensures that the project is owned and operated by the community, not driven from the "top" by academics and bureaucrats which is typical of many other projects.

#### **Integrated**

Organizations and service agencies already working in the community are brought on board to cooperate with planning, so that Better Beginnings is offered in conjunction with existing programs. This characteristic is also referred to as "value added" and is in contrast to programs that are "standalone."

Communities wishing to establish programs similar to Better Beginnings would need to incorporate all of these qualities to ensure success.





# INTRODUCTION

## Better Beginnings, Better Futures

*An effective, affordable, and cost-saving prevention project for young children*

**IN THIS BOOKLET, WE ARE PRESENTING AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH GATHERED FROM AND ABOUT GRADE 12 STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN BETTER BEGINNINGS, BETTER FUTURES PROGRAMS WHEN THEY WERE IN JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 2.**

### WHY “PREVENTION”?

Some of the kids and teens in our society do not have the same starting point as others. It is not surprising that challenges in the family and difficult conditions in the neighbourhood, not to mention lack of optimal government policies, can cause setbacks in their development and well-being. As a result, many young people, especially those in disadvantaged communities, are in need of support along the way to prevent them from having increased difficulties as they live, learn, and grow. Better Beginnings programs have attempted to combine the basic ingredients needed to provide such supports.

### WHY BETTER BEGINNINGS WAS CREATED

The 1983 Ontario Child Health Study revealed that 1 in 6 children had serious emotional or behavioural problems. The report also showed that children living in families that received social assistance or who lived in subsidized housing were at greater risk for these problems.

### ECOLOGICAL THEORY: UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN'S LIVES

There are different levels of influence, potentially helpful or harmful, on a young person's development.

If you picture the young person at the centre, the levels of influence can be described as moving outwards, similar to nesting boxes that fit one inside the other. The outer layers consist of parent and family influences, community and neighbourhood influences, and broader influences from society. Researchers refer to this nesting pattern as ecological, because it pays attention to the whole environment surrounding the young person. This way of understanding child development is called ecological theory and was first described by the social scientist Urie Bronfenbrenner.

Ecological theory was very important to the planning of Better Beginnings, Better Futures and is the reason why its programs are intended to address many levels that influence young people's lives, including their own well-being and success at school, their parents' skills and relationships with their children, and the neighbourhood atmosphere and conditions.



# INTRODUCTION

## THE SITES AND PROGRAMS

From 1993 to 1997, when the children were aged 4 to 8, programs were offered at the three chosen Better Beginnings sites, namely Sudbury, Cornwall, and Highfield. These sites were matched with two comparison sites in Ontario that were similar to them in terms of economic conditions, community characteristics, and other factors. These two sites, in Ottawa and Etobicoke, did not have Better Beginnings programs and were used by researchers to compare outcomes in the Better Beginnings sites.

Each of the three Better Beginnings sites supported the cultural identities of its young people. Thanks to the inventiveness of the planning by program staff and parents, fostering cultural diversity is a hallmark of the Better Beginnings approach.

Our previous Highlights Report on Grade 9 findings contains information about the dawn of Better Beginnings, its goals, the cultural characteristics of the sites, and descriptions of the programs provided for the young people, their parents, and the community. The Grade 9 Report may be found at:

<http://bbbf.queensu.ca/investinginourfuture.html>

It should always be remembered that Better Beginnings was not designed to see which specific programs contributed to positive outcomes for young people



and their parents and communities. Instead, Better Beginnings was designed to examine the sum total of the elements: universal, holistic, ecological, community-based, and integrated.

## THE GRADE 12 RESEARCH

Quantitative research, based on interview questions which call for “yes” or “no” answers, numeric answers (such as height and weight), and answers chosen from a range of fixed answers such as from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” was conducted with 626 young people and/or their parents.

Qualitative research was conducted with two smaller groups of young people, one involving focus groups and interviews (36 youths) and the other just interviews (96 youths), using open-ended questions - for example, those beginning with How..., When..., Why..., or Tell me about... Questions were asked in a neutral way, so that participants were not influenced in their responses.

We provide results of quantitative and qualitative research in this Highlights Report.

*Note: Only those findings considered to be statistically significant are presented in this Highlights Report. Statistically significant means that the results shown here have at least a 95% chance of being true and not due to chance.*

The National Crime Prevention Centre, Public Safety Canada, provided the funding for the Grade 12 research.

## THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Better Beginnings, Better Futures provides the first economic analysis of a Canadian early childhood prevention study. In this Highlights Report, we reveal how much was saved in direct costs to government by the Better Beginnings program.



# THE YOUNG PERSON

**IN 2007, ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS WERE CARRIED OUT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE BETTER BEGINNINGS AND COMPARISON SITES AS PART OF THE GRADE 12 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH. THESE INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED FOR THE MOST PART IN THE HOME, ON THE BASIS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE BOOKLET, A COPY OF WHICH WAS PROVIDED TO THE STUDENT FOR REFERENCE DURING THE INTERVIEW.**

## MEASURES: WHAT INFORMATION WE GATHERED

The young people were asked about their feelings (emotional functioning) and relationships (social functioning), including how much social support they had from the people around them, number of close friends, ability to clear up disagreements with their parents, and experience of depression.

They were also asked about their physical health, weight and height (to check for healthy weight), physical activity, and health risk behaviours, including alcohol, cigarette, and drug use.

Information was collected from the young people, but also from Ontario Ministry of Education records, about their success at school, including special education services used, high school grades attained, number of school suspensions, and whether or not they graduated from high school.

Youths were also asked a series of questions regarding possible criminal activities such as belonging to a gang and involvement in property damage, drugs, robbery, and assault.

## RESULTS: WHAT WE FOUND

A higher percentage of youths from the Better Beginnings sites reported engaging in regular exercise (81%) than youths from the comparison sites (72%).

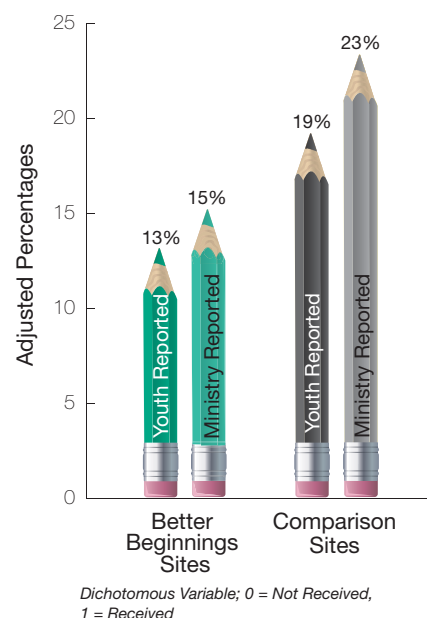
The average grade of young people from the Better Beginnings sites (75%) was higher than that of youths from the comparison sites (73%), based on their most recent year in high school.

A lower percentage of youths from the Better Beginnings sites used special education services while in high school than youths from the comparison sites. The data were relatively consistent from youth and Ministry reports: 13% versus 19% based on information from youths and 15% versus 23% based on Ontario Ministry of Education records.

**67% of the original families from the three Better Beginnings sites were involved in the Grade 12 quantitative research.**

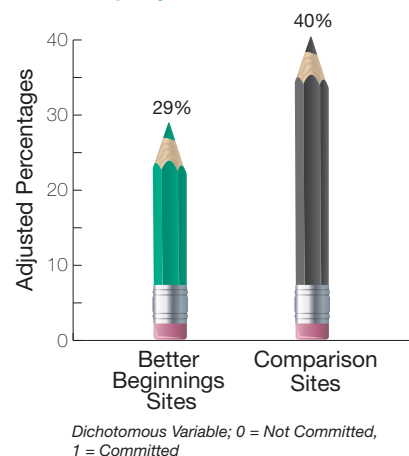
**63% of the original families from the two comparison sites were involved in the Grade 12 quantitative research.**

## Youth Special Education Services



A lower percentage of youths from the Better Beginnings neighbourhoods reported committing property offences than youths from the comparison sites (29% vs. 40% respectively).

## Youth Property Crime





# YOUTHS' STORIES

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH THE YOUTH

The portion of the research which involved the collection of qualitative information was carried out through focus groups and one-on-one interviews. This sort of research encourages young people to reflect on their experiences and express their feelings and opinions in their own words.

Group interviews (known as focus groups) and some individual interviews were held with a total of 36 young people representing the five sites. Information was gathered about their experiences of crime, their ideas about crime prevention, and their community “narratives” or stories about both.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with 96 young people in which they were asked to talk about three key life experiences: (1) a turning point in their lives; (2) their lifelong participation in community programs, including Better Beginnings (while aged 4 to 8) and school-required community service; and (3) their experiences of community life, including involvement, neighbourhoods, and crime.

## FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS...

### HOW YOUNG PEOPLE DESCRIBE CRIME

Given that in 1991 the Better Beginnings and comparison communities were chosen on the basis of similar socio-economic disadvantage, it is relevant to look at experiences of crime of young people at all the sites. Here is one youth's description of the crime in the neighbourhood.

*The drug and gun violence, I mean there's like petty theft every once in a while, nothing big, we haven't had a murder in our neighbourhood for quite a while now, so, there's nothing big like that. It's just basically like drugs just taking over most of the time. You go downstairs and the kids have to be in at a certain time because you don't want them outside too late because they see certain things.*

## YOUTHS' IDEAS FOR CRIME PREVENTION

The youths' suggestions for and criticisms of crime prevention actions were aimed at the different ecological levels described in this booklet: the young person, their close relationships, and the broader community.

### The Young Person

Youths discussed personal qualities that prevented them from being involved in crime, and behaviours they used to prevent themselves from becoming victims.

*You lose respect for yourself. If someone found out that I stabbed someone [this is just an example], they would lose total respect for me, I probably wouldn't even have any friends, because of it...Even my neighbours, would be sketchy [uncomfortable] living besides someone who stabbed someone...There's just certain things that you know not to do and if you do them, you sit back and you say, what was I doing, that's not who I am. ... You have to live with yourself after you've done that. You have to live with what your parents or your friends think.*

### Close Relationships

By Grade 12, young people's peers, and adults in addition to their parents, have become part of their ecological circle of influence. These relationships can be important in preventing involvement in crime.

*I think all that matters is who you are surrounded with, because if you're surrounded with people from a bad environment or that are always going to put negative thoughts [in your mind], I think that's going to affect you more than you having self-discipline towards yourself.*

### The Broader Community

Youths suggested solutions that brought together community members, schools, and even police, including such projects as Neighbourhood Watch, an increase in socializing within the community, employment agencies, and “organized-time” activities like after-school programs and sports. They also, however, acknowledged some of the suggested programs' more serious drawbacks. For example, Neighbourhood Watch might actually be ineffective because of people's fears of the consequences of being a tattletale.

## FROM THE INTERVIEWS...

### TURNING-POINT STORIES

Although qualitative research gathers information from participants in their own words, it is still possible to rate responses numerically. For instance, young people's turning-point stories were given a numeric score based on: how specific or detailed the story was, whether the youth's emotional state changed from the beginning to the end of the story, how well the turning point was resolved or taken care of in the end, the personal growth that the youth experienced, how meaningful the story was for the youth, and how clear and organized the youth's story was. We found that in all of these areas except the first, Better Beginnings youths told significantly more positive stories than youths from the comparison sites.

#### Turning-Point Resolution

The figure below shows how the Better Beginnings and comparison sites compared in terms of how well youths' turning-point stories were resolved.

#### How well youths' stories were resolved



The following quotations reveal that those who participated in Better Beginnings told turning-point stories that were more resolved at the end than were stories told by comparison participants.

These are the words of a Better Beginnings youth:

*I remember in grade 10, I came down with an illness... I was out of school for 3 months... I wanted to live life like there was no tomorrow so after I got better I still didn't go to school. But then I remembered all the sports that I had and that helped me turn back to getting back into school... I realized that I wanted to get a good education... sports helped me turn back on track towards my future... if I could do that, the world can't stop me now.*

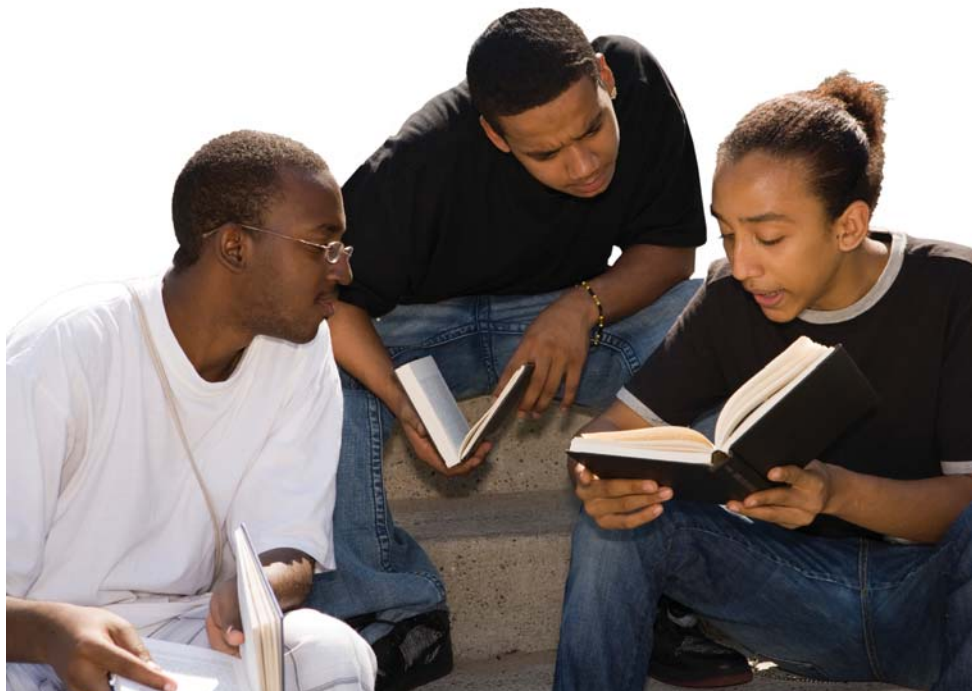
This youth's comments about having gotten back on track with a view to the future and what was learned show that this event has been sorted out and the young person is content with the conclusion.

A comparison-site youth told this story:

*There was an incident at home, Children's Aid was called so I had to move to a centre for people with anger problems... then I got kicked out of there and went to a group home in [another city]... there were a lot of insane incidents up in [that city]... one time, someone next door got busted for marijuana... Everywhere you go, you're going to see somebody getting jumped, somebody getting mugged, or people fighting... but I met some good people... I think it was a wrong idea moving back from there. Because I had a better education up there... now that I moved back from [that city] everything has changed... all my friends are gone, everybody's gone so I'm just keeping on the down low, I'm not getting into trouble anymore.*

This story shows some resolution, because the participant has learned from experience in the other city to stay out of trouble. However, although no longer getting into trouble, the young person is not happy being home, leaving the story somewhat unresolved.

Clearly, the story of the Better Beginnings youth is more resolved than the story of the comparison youth.





## THE PARENT

PRIVATE ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS WERE CARRIED OUT AT HOME WITH PARENTS FROM THE BETTER BEGINNINGS AND COMPARISON SITES AS A PART OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH. OF THE FAMILIES INVOLVED IN THE STUDY, 28% WERE SINGLE-MOTHER FAMILIES. IN THOSE FAMILIES WITH TWO PARENTS, IT WAS UP TO THE FAMILY TO DECIDE WHICH PARENT WOULD BE INTERVIEWED. THE RESULT WAS THAT 95% OF THE PARENTS INTERVIEWED WERE MOTHERS.

### MEASURES: WHAT INFORMATION WE GATHERED

A number of questions were asked to find out whether parents appeared to be influenced in a positive way by the Better Beginnings programs.

Information was collected on parents' physical health, including permanent health problems and weight problems (based on a ratio of weight to height), and both positive health behaviours (regular exercise) and negative health behaviours (smoking and alcohol consumption).

Questions were posed about parents' perceptions of the social support around them, how well their family members got along (family functioning), and how happy they were in their

marriage (marital satisfaction). They were also asked about their social life (social functioning) and their feelings (emotional functioning), particularly their feelings of depression. Neither the interviewer nor the parent herself knew whether or not her responses indicated clinical depression at the time of the interview. In this way, the parent's privacy was protected. All parents were provided with a community resource booklet at the end of the interview. If a specific kind of help was requested, the interviewer helped identify the relevant section of the booklet.



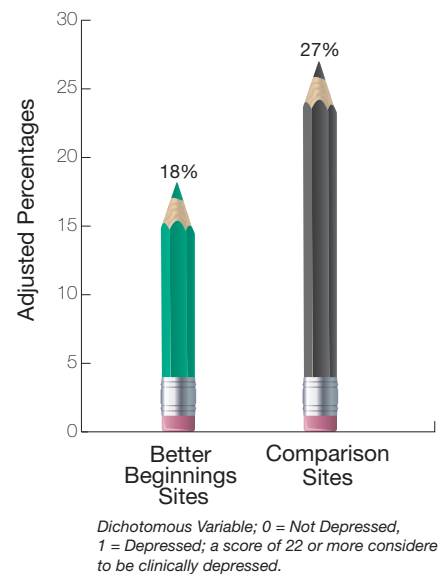
*I would go down to my friend's house down the street, [and] my dad would watch me walk [there]. He'd stand outside the driveway and watch me walk until I would get there, just for safety. And I'm happy he did that.*

a Grade 12 student remembers

### RESULTS: WHAT WE FOUND

Fewer Better Beginnings parents were considered to be clinically depressed (18%) than comparison-site parents (27%).

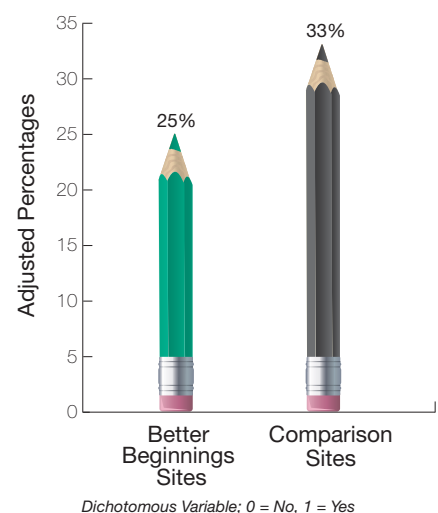
#### Parent Clinical Depression



Parents from the Better Beginnings sites reported drinking alcohol less frequently than parents from the comparison sites.

Also, although there were no differences in parents' rates of smoking in Better Beginnings versus comparison sites, fewer Better Beginnings parents (25%) than comparison-site parents (33%) reported that there was at least one other smoker in the home.

#### At Least One Other Smoker in Family







# THE COMMUNITY

ONLY THOSE YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS STILL LIVING IN THE ORIGINAL BETTER BEGINNINGS AND COMPARISON SITES WERE INTERVIEWED ABOUT NEIGHBOURHOODS AS PART OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH (ABOUT 260 FAMILIES IN TOTAL).

## MEASURES: WHAT INFORMATION WE GATHERED

Questions were asked to assess the degree to which youths and their parents felt actively involved in the neighbourhood, how satisfied they felt with the community, and how much drug use, violence, and theft they perceived in their local neighbourhood (this is described as deviance).



Parents' and youths' sense of neighbourhood participation and involvement (cohesion) was assessed using a series of five statements (for example, *"I feel like I belong to this neighbourhood"* and *"I feel I am important to this neighbourhood"*).

Regarding neighbourhood deviance, parents and youths were asked about the frequency of five "deviant" neighbourhood activities: alcohol, marijuana, and hard drug use, violence, and theft.

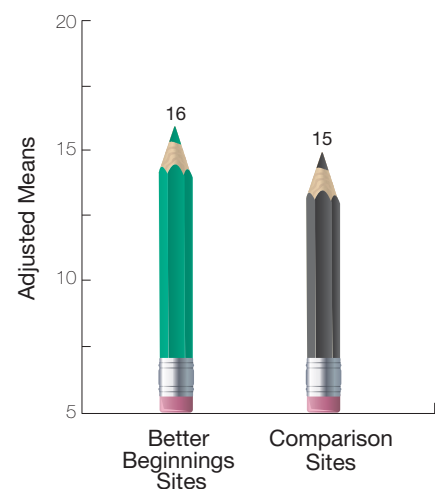
Also, for youths, information was collected as to whether or not they had met the community service requirement established by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

## RESULTS: WHAT WE FOUND

Two measures showed more positive outcomes associated with the Better Beginnings neighbourhoods.

Parents from the Better Beginnings sites rated their neighbourhoods as more cohesive.

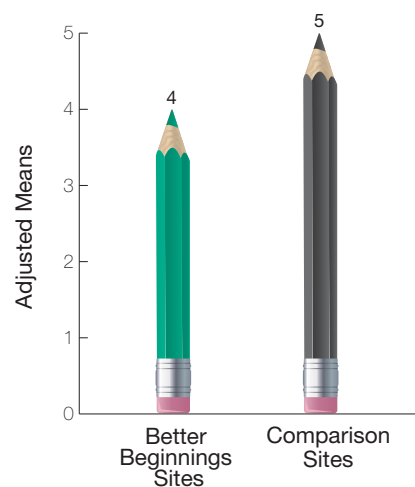
### Parent Sense of Neighbourhood Cohesion



5 item scale; higher score indicates higher cohesion; range 5 to 20; respondents living outside BBBF sites excluded.

As well, Better Beginnings youths viewed their neighbourhoods as safer, less deviant places to live than did comparison site youths, in terms of drug use, violence, and theft.

### Youth Perceived Neighbourhood Deviance



5 item scale; higher score indicates higher deviance; range 0 to 15; respondents living outside BBBF sites excluded from analysis.

# THE COMMUNITY

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PREVENTION

Young people from both the Better Beginnings and comparison sites had positive things to say about their participation in organized community activities (many as part of their school-required community service).

*[I learned] a lot through the [multicultural festival]. I'm a person that loves different people... Most of my friends are different cultures ... it's different, it's interesting actually to know how they live, to see the difference from your own [culture].*

*It was nice to meet girls my age...that were nice girls, I mean they didn't do drugs. They weren't mean girls. They didn't judge me. We were all really good friends. There was one girl in that group that was handicapped and we were all good friends with her. No judging within the group.*

*I had done my community hours at an old folks home by doing activities with them and I absolutely loved it so I decided to go on to personal support worker. And I think I'm going to go on to either maybe nursing or just jump right in and just do this.*

*I'd say [participating in the community settings] definitely made me grow as a person. I'm much more mature; able to understand the world a little more and how the world works.*

*I felt proud of myself, really happy with what I did because I was able to kind of give back for [what others did for me]...I just feel...it's gotta work both ways type of thing. In order to be successful, I think everybody needs to help each other out.*

A close analysis of statements by the young people, however, suggested that those from the Better Beginnings sites had participated more in community programs throughout their lives than had the youths from comparison communities, and that their participation had resulted in a greater impact in their lives in terms of prevention, by encouraging healthy behaviours and improvements in feelings of well-being.

## YOUTHS' STORIES ABOUT COMMUNITY

We also asked youths to talk about other ways in which they are involved in their communities, beyond the community service required by schools. In these stories, Better Beginnings youths in all three sites talked about being a part of their community in ways that provided more detail than comparison youths. More detailed stories highlighted overall how youths, parents, teachers, and schools interconnect to create community. Youths told stories that illustrated times when their community had influenced them to conform or to change the way they act, resulting in greater group cohesion. Another important aspect of community that Better Beginnings youths discussed more than comparison youths was emotional attachment to a group and often this seemed to develop through informal social interaction, highlighting the role that fun plays in developing youths' sense of community. Overall, youth narratives supported the view that the Better Beginnings program created youths' positive sense of community.





# ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

**BETTER BEGINNINGS PROVIDES THE FIRST ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF A CANADIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD PREVENTION STUDY. GIVEN THAT FUNDING FOR PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS IS SCARCE, ECONOMIC EVALUATION CAN BE A USEFUL TOOL FOR INFORMING POLICY-MAKERS AS TO WHETHER A PREVENTION PROGRAM IS A GOOD USE OF SOCIETY'S LIMITED RESOURCES.**

## OVERVIEW OF OUR ANALYSIS

Economic benefits of government-funded programs are typically divided into three categories:

- benefits to program participants (e.g., increased income from improved education),
- benefits to non-program participants (e.g., reduced costs to crime victims), and
- benefits to government/taxpayers (e.g., decreased special education costs, decreased costs to the justice system).

The Better Beginnings economic analysis is focused on benefits to the government/taxpayers.

We refer to this analysis as a cost-savings analysis because it calculates how much government cost was saved as a result of the Better Beginnings programs. We consider our calculation to be a conservative or modest estimate, because it considers only direct savings to government and excludes projected or likely future savings to government, such as the potential long-term savings that could result from keeping a youth from our program from a life of crime or from a future period of time on welfare.

Many of the outcomes that result in significant cost savings do not begin to occur until children are in their mid-to late teens. That is why an economic analysis of Better Beginnings is of interest at Grade 12.

*Does prevention pay? Can an ounce of prevention avoid (at least) an ounce of cure? More specifically for public policy purposes, is there credible scientific evidence that for each dollar a legislature spends on "research-based" prevention or early intervention programs for youth, more than a dollar's worth of benefits will be generated? If so, what are the policy options that offer taxpayers the best return on their dollar?*

Steve Aos and co-authors,  
Benefits and Costs of Prevention and  
Early Intervention Programs for Youth  
(Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2004)

Of 19 childhood programs analyzed in terms of cost-benefits by Steve Aos and co-authors, 10 resulted in long-term financial benefits that offset initial program costs. Of these 10, however, only three yielded economic benefits to government/taxpayers, and the value of these benefits relative to program costs was very small.





# ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

## FROM 1993 TO 1997...

### BETTER BEGINNINGS PROGRAM BUDGET

The expenses of the Better Beginnings programs for children aged 4 to 8 years and their parents from 1993 to 1997 included staff salaries and benefits, materials for educational and recreational activities, and food for snacks and small meals. An overview of ways in which spending was divided up at the different sites is provided in the economic analysis section of the Grade 9 Highlights Report.

### VOLUNTEERISM

To a great extent, the programs at the sites were volunteer-driven, especially the management and planning committees, which included many parent volunteers – although some parents were given paid positions. The involvement of parents and other community volunteers in program development is a key ingredient of the Better Beginnings approach, because community members are best equipped to know the needs of their young people and to make suggestions related to programming.



### DIRECT COST PER FAMILY

The average annual budget from 1993 to 1997 was approximately \$580,000 per site (therefore, \$580,000 x 3 sites x 4 years). Funding to cover this budget was provided by the Ontario provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Education and Training.

The programs were offered to each child in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 2 and their parents at the Better Beginnings sites for a total of four years. Over the course of the project, some of the families moved away from the sites before they received all 48 months of programs. The direct cost per family for participation from 1993 to 1997 is calculated by determining the total number of months of participation of all the children and dividing the total program budget by this number of months to arrive at a cost per family per month.

The cost per family per month is then multiplied by the number of months in which each family participated in Better Beginnings programs and then an average overall cost per family is calculated.

The figure \$2,991 represents the average government allocation per family over the years of program participation and exposure.



## FROM JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12...

### WHAT INFORMATION WE GATHERED

From the time when the children were first in Junior Kindergarten to when they were in Grade 12, the Better Beginnings Research Coordination Unit gathered an increasing amount of information annually from the young people and their parents about contact with publicly-funded medical, educational, and social services (by 2007, information about contact with 19 services had been gathered).

Each time a person comes into contact with one of these services, it costs the government a specific amount of money. This amount was multiplied by the number of times the parents or youths had contact with each service to establish a cost amount for each person from the Better Beginnings sites compared to those from the comparison sites.

Costs associated with overweight and obesity were calculated on the basis of another study which established costs to government services per adult with one of these weight conditions.

### WHAT WE FOUND

The results showed that it cost the government less money to provide services in the education and social service fields for families in the Better Beginnings sites than for families in the comparison sites. In the health field, it cost the government more money to provide services for Better Beginnings families.

The largest saving to government was due to lower use of special education services.

The overall cost per family for the 19 government services was \$7,560 less for Better Beginnings families than families from the comparison sites.

Therefore, the savings gained in the 19 public agencies more than covers the \$2,991 cost per family amount for Better Beginnings programs. To date, Better Beginnings is saving the government approximately \$4,569 per family.

This cost-savings analysis justifies past, present, and future use of government funds for Better Beginnings prevention programs.

### DID BETTER BEGINNINGS SAVE THE GOVERNMENT/TAXPAYERS MONEY?

TRACKED CONTACT WITH SERVICES	SAVINGS	COST PER BETTER BEGINNINGS FAMILY
<b>HEALTH SERVICES</b> (Y+P: youth and parent contact) (Y: youth contact only)		
Number of serious injuries (defined as those requiring treatment) (Y)	No	\$ 26 more
Visit with a nurse practitioner (Y+P)	No	9 more
Visit to a family physician (Y+P)	No	1 more
Emergency room use (Y+P)	No	313 more
Number of overnight stays in hospital (Y)	No	871 more
Being overweight (Y+P)	Yes	39 less
Being obese (Y+P)	Yes	114 less
<b>Savings in Health Services</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>\$1,067 more</b>
<b>EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM</b> (youth contact)		
Use of special education services in elementary and high school	Yes	\$ 5,159 less
Grade repetition in elementary school	Yes	343 less
Courses failed in high school	No	186 more
<b>Savings in the Educational System</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>\$5,316 less</b>
<b>SOCIAL SERVICES</b> (family contact)		
Visits with social worker	No	\$ 2 more
Social welfare assistance	Yes	921 less
Ontario disability support program	Yes	2,764 less
Worker's compensation	No	372 more
<b>Savings in Social Services</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>\$3,311 less</b>
<b>TOTAL SAVINGS to government per Better Beginnings family</b>		<b>\$7,560</b>
<b>DIRECT COST per family for up to four years of Better Beginnings programs</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$2,991</b>
<b>NET SAVINGS to government per Better Beginnings family</b>		<b>\$4,569</b>



## ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

As the first economic analysis of a Canadian early childhood prevention study, the result is good news indeed. A conservative cost-savings analysis based on direct costs and excluding projected costs shows that the overall cost per family for 19 government services was at least \$7,560 less for Better Beginnings families than families from the comparison sites. Therefore, based on the average of \$2,991 spent per family for participation in Better Beginnings programs, the government has saved approximately \$4,569 per family by Grade 12 on other services, including education and social services.

## QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

**The Young Person:** Better Beginnings youths were more likely to engage in regular exercise than comparison youths. Better Beginnings young people had higher average marks and used special education services less. Better Beginnings youths were less likely to be involved in committing property offences.

**The Parent:** Fewer Better Beginnings parents were considered to be clinically depressed and they also reported drinking alcohol less frequently than parents from the comparison sites. Also, fewer Better Beginnings parents reported at least one other smoker in the home than did comparison-site parents.

**The Community:** Parents from the Better Beginnings sites rated their neighbourhoods as more cohesive and Better Beginnings youths described lower amounts of drug use, violence, and theft in their surroundings.

**Turning-Point Stories:** The differences in the narrative research involving Better Beginnings youths and those from the comparison sites illustrate that those who participated in Better Beginnings showed greater emotional change, conclusiveness (resolution), personal growth, meaningfulness, and clarity (coherence) in their turning-point stories, but not greater detail (specificity).

### Community Participation and Stories

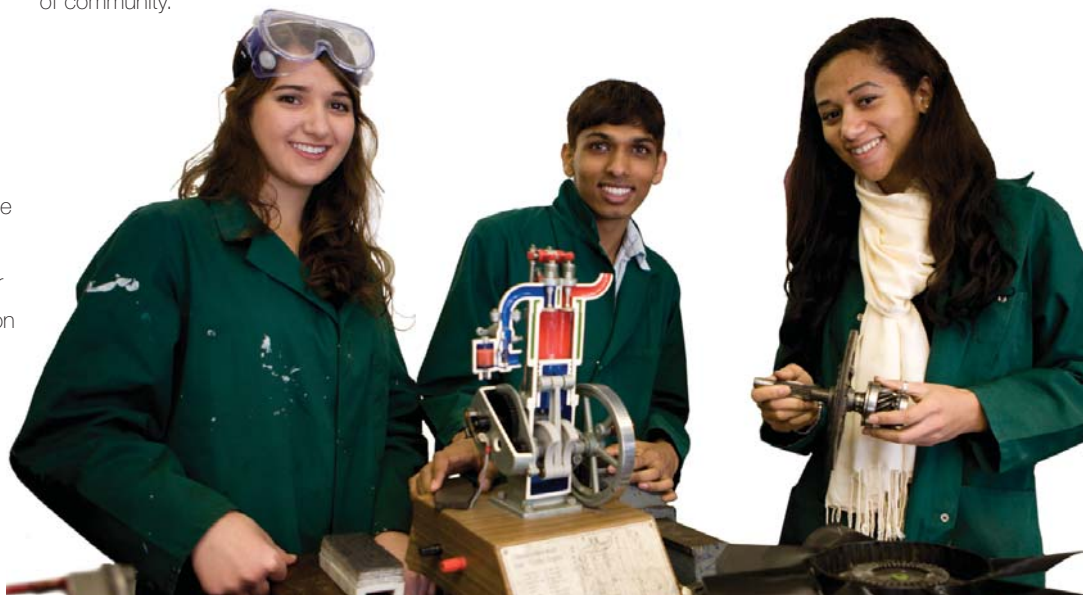
**About Community:** A close examination of statements by young people from the Better Beginnings communities suggested that they had participated more in community programs throughout their lives than had the youths from comparison communities, and that their participation had produced a greater impact in their lives in terms of prevention, by encouraging healthy behaviours and improvements in feelings of well-being. Also, youths' stories supported the view that the Better Beginnings program created youths' positive sense of community.

## QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

**Crime Prevention:** The focus groups on crime narratives demonstrated that youths have valuable input to contribute to the development of effective crime prevention programs. Young people from two of the three Better Beginnings sites had positive stories and ideas about how to prevent crime in their neighbourhoods, while stories in the comparison sites emphasized crime itself. This suggests that the Better Beginnings project had a positive impact on communities and youths.

## NEXT STEPS FOR BETTER BEGINNINGS

We have been awarded funds to develop a "How to Start a Better Beginnings, Better Futures Program" manual and DVD. These materials will be presented at workshops in every province and territory across Canada by March 2013 and the materials will be available on the program website for download by the public.





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## Better Beginnings, Better Futures

