

**Values, Process and Commitment:
Better Beginnings, Better Futures
Project Organization and Management**

Summary Report

First Version May 1997

Revised December 1997

Revised July 1998

Gary Cameron & Jim Vanderwoerd

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This report describes activities in seven Better Beginnings, Better Futures communities and is based on individual site reports prepared by the following researchers:

Cornwall	Lucie Vincent-Leblanc, Yves Herry and Denis Levesque, June 1996
Etobicoke	Geoffrey Nelson, S. Mark Pancer and Karen Hayward, October 1996
Guelph	Jim Vanderwoerd, June 1996
Kingston	Jim Vanderwoerd and Dawn Blessing, February 1997
Ottawa	Ruth Charles, Karen Lee Miller, Pamela Turpin, Tess Dawber and Jim Vanderwoerd, April 1997
Sudbury	Lamine Diallo, June 1996
Toronto	Dia Mamatis and Gloria Roberts-Fiati, August 1996

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PART 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This summary report provides an overview how seven Better Beginnings, Better Futures prevention projects were organized and managed. The time period covered in this report is from early 1991 until June 1995. In a few instances, some information was available for 1996.

The *Project Organization and Management* report includes more of an assessment and an interpretation of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures experience than any of the four previous cross-site reports. There are several reasons for this. In part, it can be attributed to the fact that the Better Beginnings, Better Futures projects have evolved over the past six years to the point where their basic characteristics have become clearer to participants. In addition, the topics addressed by this report touch on many central aspects of the demonstration projects such as community development, project development, project governance, staffing, management, relations with host organizations as well as prevention programming. As a result, the seven individual site reports on which this cross-site report is based provided more of an assessment of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures experience than the earlier site reports had done.

The individual organization and management site reports were lengthy and complex. Also, in the opinion of the authors, there were great differences in project organization and management principles and practices between the various sites. As a result, a cross-site report cannot capture the intricacies of project organization and management at each demonstration site. For a greater understanding of a particular site, the reader is referred to the individual site report. For more discussion and for the supporting evidence upon which our conclusions are based, readers should examine the main *Project and Management Report*. This cross-site report summary is presented as a general overview only. It focuses on general patterns, or the similarities and differences between the sites, and on the questions these patterns raise.

Better Beginnings, Better Futures is an intricate initiative about which participants have strong opinions and beliefs. How we see Better Beginnings, Better Futures seems to be very much influenced both by our position in relation to the demonstration project and the history and the

values we bring to the experience. In the authors' opinion, the cross-site report illustrates that it would be an error for participants at one demonstration site to presume that their experience and opinions about Better Beginnings reflects what others do or believe at the other demonstration sites. There are as many differences as there are similarities from community to community.

This cross-site report may challenge the perceptions and beliefs of some readers. For this reason, it would be useful to clarify the position and the perspective from which this report is written. The authors have had the opportunity to compare and contrast the information in the seven site reports without having any strong prior attachment to a particular site or ways of working. On the other hand, our interpretation of this information will be coloured by our own orientation towards project organization and management. We would describe ourselves as favouring a middle ground between established organization and management procedures and creating new approaches specifically for Better Beginnings. The comments on the first draft of this report show clearly that others with different orientations may read these data differently. However, we make a consistent effort to provide sufficient examples in this report to allow the readers to decide for themselves the appropriateness of our conclusions. In addition, whenever possible, we have included interpretations from the first review of this document which differ from our own into appropriate sections of this report.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Information in this report is drawn from individual site reports in seven communities. A multiple case study approach (Yin, 1989) was used in which data were gathered by site researchers in each community. Site researchers gathered information by observing activities in the sites and compiling field notes. The field notes consisted of semi-verbatim accounts of project participants' discussions in meetings, summary descriptions of various project activities, and interpretive comments and reflections by the researchers about what they had observed. The researchers supplemented the field notes by interviewing project participants, both individually and in groups, about specific issues related to organization and management in the local projects.

Members of the Research Coordination Unit, together with the site researchers and research groups in each community, developed an outline for the report. Using this outline, site

researchers prepared site specific reports about organization and management. Information from these seven site reports was then compiled to produce this cross site report. To protect the identities of individuals and organizations at each site, this report refers to the sites by number, and refers to organizations by generic names.

PART II

3.0 VALUES AND PRINCIPLES GUIDING PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Developing an organization which was based on shared values and principles was important to the Better Beginnings projects. Members and participants in all sites spent much time and energy identifying, discussing, and clarifying the values and principles which would guide them in the development of their projects. In some cases, attention to values seemed to hold as much importance as the operating procedures themselves.

In some ways, the focus on values and principles comes from *Better Beginnings, Better Futures: An integrated model of primary prevention of emotional and behavioural problems* (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1989) and the way in which the project was initiated. Some of the major principles identified in this document are integration of services and programs, community involvement in identifying needs and developing programs, flexibility, comprehensiveness, universal accessibility, and high quality. Articulation of some or all of these values was reported at all of the sites. However, of all these values, the one which was mentioned the most frequently in all seven sites was the involvement of community residents. For example,

We are committed to a community development approach in all aspects of our project. Community Development is a process in which the community identifies its issues and participates in solutions to them (site 1).

This principle is first articulated in the original proposal. In the section on Community Involvement it states: “The success of this project depends upon the involvement of the entire community”.... “Community control is evident throughout all levels, from [the steering committee] and set up for community control and participants as a regular part...” (site 4).

This principle is foundational to the project, and facilitates the recognition of the role of neighbourhood residents. Intentional efforts to recruit, support, train and maintain community residents ... are based on a principle which allows every

participant an opportunity to speak in their own voice to any discussion about the project... it is clear that the involvement of community residents is a key principle throughout the project... (site 5).

The evidence for this emphasis on community involvement comes not just from the articulation of these broad principles in every site, but also by several other values at particular sites which flow from this commitment. These included a commitment towards community ownership and control, inclusiveness, the use of consensus decision making, the priority of community development processes over other project objectives, hiring from within the community, and adopting democratic and non-hierarchical management styles.

Compared to community involvement, none of the other principles outlined in the original Better Beginnings document received as much attention. For example, service integration, which received more emphasis in the original Better Beginnings document as well as the corresponding *Request for Proposals* (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1990), is explicitly mentioned as a basic guiding value at three sites. This does not mean that concerns such as integration and partnerships were not important at the sites or that progress was not made in these areas. However, in the site reports resident involvement was given much more attention as a core organization and management principle for the projects.

The integrated model described in the original Better Beginnings document also emphasized developing programs with high quality staff. Perhaps related to this idea, at least four site reports articulated a value of supporting and taking care of the hired staff. Compared to the value of community involvement and participation, however, these values received mention in fewer site reports, but as well, there was far more attention to developing and clarifying the concept of community involvement.

One value that was clearly articulated by all but one site was the notion that the Better Beginnings projects represented, in the words of one site, “a new way of thinking and acting” (site 6). The descriptions and the language in some site reports suggest that people in Better Beginnings see themselves as being part of something that is new, unique, and, perhaps, even better, than other organizations. For example:

“I think we are really creating an alternative and it is not perfect, it could be a whole lot better but there is a really powerful alternative to boards that is happening here.” (site 4)

[One neighbourhood participant] said that her understanding was that this project was to organize itself not according to accepted practices and systems, but rather be innovative and creative. (site 5)

The perception that Better Beginnings is about creating new alternatives to traditional project organization seems primarily to have been linked to the projects’ focus on involving community residents in their organizations. Descriptions about alternatives are mostly centred on the mechanisms which the sites used to bring community residents into their organization and efforts made to support and encourage them in these new roles. This is consistent with the earlier observation that of all the principles identified in the original Better Beginnings documents, the value which most captured the imagination of project participants at most sites seems to have been community involvement and development.

4.0 ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNING STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

The organizational structure which the sites developed to manage their projects followed a similar pattern. As will be seen later, however, this similarity was superficial. That is, the broad structures appeared similar, but more detailed scrutiny of each site revealed many more differences than similarities.

The heart of the organizational structure was the decision-making group with the responsibility to manage the projects. These decision-making groups were intended to function roughly the way an agency board would. The decision-making group typically had a number of committees or groups reporting to it. Across six sites, groups were established with responsibilities in finance and budgets; personnel and hiring; physical space, buildings, and property; bylaws, agreements, and rules; and special events, recreation, and social events. In addition to these groups, the sites also had a number of committees (ranging from 2 to 5) focusing on specific program components, as well as a research group.

4.1 Evolving Structures

There were some similar points along the path which each site followed as their projects evolved. When the funding was announced in January 1991, most of the sites were still run by the group which had developed the proposals. As described in the earlier report on proposal development, *Communities Coming Together: Proposal Development in the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project* (Pancer et al; 1992), these groups were characterized by an open, flexible membership, and in number and influence were dominated by organizational representatives.

These early decision-making groups faced two overlapping tasks in the first year or two after funding was announced. One of these was the challenge of taking the ideas from the original proposal and beginning to develop and implement programs; the other task was hiring the staff. Adding both new staff and program committees influenced the way the decision-making groups functioned. The roles and responsibilities of the decision-making group, the staff, and the program groups came under scrutiny and forced the decision-making groups to re-think their roles:

In general, as staff was hired, there was a shift in the balance of leadership from the Steering Committee to staff. (site 1)

[The Project Coordinator] said that as new staff came on board, and will begin to do some of the work that the [decision-making group] has been doing, it is important to define the role of the [decision-making group]. (site 4)

On top of the demands of sorting out the roles and responsibilities of the decision-making group, newly hired staff, and program development groups, the sites also faced another task. This was the challenge of developing an organizational structure which facilitated the involvement and participation of community residents. In all of the sites, this meant increasing the influence, numbers and/or proportion of residents in decision-making roles:

As soon as the funding proposal was approved, the initial coalition worked on increasing community participation within the regular activities of the project development and management. (site 2)

Initially the Steering Committee was comprised of 5 designated community residents and 4 local service providers. The Steering Committee increased its voting membership to 8 residents. (site 3)

The decision of having equal representation of parents and agencies on the [decision-making group] resulted in the reduction of the number of agencies participating in the project's administration. (site 7)

All the sites had to contend with these three simultaneous challenges in the first years of the project. Arising from strongly held values for community involvement and development, the sites tried to devise ways of bringing community residents into project governance. At the same time, there were additional demands to develop and implement their programs, and hire all their staff. Developing programs and hiring staff was challenging enough; doing these while also attempting to facilitate community participation sometimes seemed overwhelming. It is not surprising that at many of the sites, project participants found this to be a difficult challenge which required time, effort and patience:

... the board had to spend a great deal of time with the many details and demands of starting something new. There were no personnel policies, no bylaws, no accepted ways of operating, no procedures for board membership and selection. All of these types of issues had to be resolved, in addition to the demands of developing the program model. (site 5)

More recently, there has been one more common stop along the projects' path. As the projects grew in complexity and size, project governance became more challenging. In response, at least five sites made adjustments to simplify, formalize or clarify their organizational structure and/or procedures.

4.2 Portraits of Project Governance

On the surface, there were similarities among the sites in both their organizational governing structures and in their paths of project development. What is more striking, however, is the differences between the sites. In order to appreciate these variations, each site's organizational governance structure and characteristics are summarized in Table 4.1, and are profiled individually below. It is important to note, that these brief descriptions cannot do justice to the volume of information contained in the site reports. To understand more completely what is going on at each site, readers are advised to consult each site report. With this limitation in

mind, the following portraits highlight some of the key elements of each site's governing structure.

Site One

Site one was governed by a decision-making group consisting of ten members, half of whom were community residents and half were local agency representatives. Reporting to the decision-making group were a personnel committee and a finance committee, as well as program committees. The Executive Director of the sponsor agency sat on the decision-making group and the finance committee to link the sponsor agency to the project. Membership on the decision-making group was fairly fluid, especially in earlier years, and no set procedures were reported for selecting members. In 1995 an executive committee was formed consisting of three decision-making group members plus the Project Manager.

Table 4.1 Characteristics of Decision Making Groups at Better Beginnings, Better Futures Demonstration Sites

	Sites						
Characteristics	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven
Total members	10	13	15	18	22	7	12
# residents	5	11-13	10	12	12	4	6
# agencies	5	0	5	6	6	3	6
# other/at large	0	3	0	0	2	0	0
Staff on board/group	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no
cultural/regional representatives	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
Sponsor agency member	yes	n/a	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Meeting frequency	monthly	monthly	monthly	2x month	monthly	monthly	monthly
Set selection procedures	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no
Supporting general membership	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Regular committees							
Executive	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
Finance	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Personnel	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
program(s)	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Site Two

Since 1994, site two has been governed by two incorporated organizations; one which governs the Better Beginnings project, and one which is able to receive charitable donations for other activities not funded by Better Beginnings. The Better Beginnings governing body consists of thirteen members who are elected by the general membership each year at an annual meeting. Ten of the thirteen members represent five groups within the project: four cultural groups, plus staff; the remaining three positions are at-large. The decision-making group holds regular monthly meetings. Membership in the organization is available to anyone who resides in the neighbourhood who subscribes to the project's vision and principles which are spelled out in the corporations' bylaws. People who are outside the neighbourhood can become members if they are sponsored by a neighbourhood resident.

Site Three

This site is governed by a Steering Committee consisting of ten neighbourhood residents and five agency representatives. There is an informal agreement to get residents from several different neighbourhoods within the project's boundaries, as well as to allow two spots for neighbourhood residents who are also staff of the Better Beginnings project. Turnover of membership on the steering committee is fairly frequent, and there are no set selection procedures; as noted in the site report, "... if people are interested in being on the Steering Committee they are welcomed and voting them in is just a formality". The sponsor agency did not have a spot on the Steering Committee until 1996, however, the project is represented on the sponsor's Board, and the Project Coordinator is accountable to the Executive Director of the sponsor. Reporting to the steering committee are several program committees and committees for finance and research, and an ad hoc hiring committee.

Site Four

The commitment in this site's original proposal to resident participation led to the establishment of a decision-making group with a 2:1 ratio of residents to agency representatives. In April 1991, the decision-making group was established with twelve community residents and

six agency representatives. Any resident from the community, or any person working in an agency providing service to the community, who had attended a minimum of two decision-making group meetings was eligible to be on the decision-making group. Turnover was fairly high, particularly in the first few years, and vacancies were filled by having nominees voted in by the decision-making group. The Executive Director of the sponsor agency sits on the decision-making group, and also is the chair of the Finance Committee and Hiring Committee. Decision-making meetings are held twice a month. In 1993 there was an attempt to shift to once a month, however members felt there was too much on the agendas. Since then, meetings have been held twice a month, but one meeting is designated a business meeting at which decisions are made, and the other meeting is an information meeting. In addition to the Finance and Hiring Committees, there are committees for bylaws, space, special events, newsletter, and a number of program committees.

Site Five

Since 1994, this project has been governed as an incorporated organization with a board made up of twelve community residents, six agency representatives, and two at-large members. Board members are elected by a general membership at an annual general meeting in the fall. Board members from the neighbourhood are approved by a separate Neighbourhood Association; neighbourhood residents who are staff persons of the organization are also eligible for Board membership subject to the Neighbourhood Association's approval. Board meetings are held once per month. Administration is facilitated by an Executive consisting of two neighbourhood and two agency members, as well as the Project Coordinator. The sponsor agency has a permanent seat on the Board, and since 1990 this seat has been filled by the Executive Director of the sponsor agency. Reporting to the Board are committees with responsibility for finance, personnel, research, as well as a variety of program committees. Despite being incorporated, the project has maintained its reliance on the sponsor agency for legal, financial and administrative auspices and support.

Site Six

This site is governed by a seven-member Steering Committee consisting of four neighbourhood residents, the local school principal, and two agency representatives. The Steering Committee meets once per month to oversee the project and to provide consultation to the Project Manager. Under the Steering Committee are the following committees: letter of agreement [with the sponsor agency], personnel, research, as well as several program committees. The site report notes that the committees have considerable autonomy; for example, "... each of the program sub-committees make decisions about how the budget for that program area will be spent". To guide the Steering Committee, annual planning day meetings, plus bi-monthly meetings of the general project membership, are held. There do not appear to be set procedures for membership selection to the Steering Committee.

Site Seven

The decision-making group for this project is made up of six neighbourhood and six agency members. The group meets once a month to govern the project and to monitor activities from its various committees, including personnel and a number of program committees. The sponsor agency holds one of the agency seats on the decision-making group; two other agency seats are reserved for school boards, while the final three agency seats appear to be chosen by the agencies based on the perceived relevance of their services to Better Beginnings. There is also an Executive Committee consisting of neighbourhood members in the President and Vice-President roles, and the sponsor agency in the Treasurer role. There do not appear to be any prescribed procedures for selection of neighbourhood members, although there are attempts to get representation from various school communities served by the project. In 1994, the project established an independent incorporated organization with structures and membership which mirror the current governance structures, with a view to taking over all responsibilities for the prevention project.

4.3 Competing Dynamics in Project Governance

At least two dynamics have become apparent in examining the projects' organizational structures and processes. First, the sites have struggled with trying to accommodate two purposes which pulled them in different directions. On the one hand, they were attempting to develop governance structures which would efficiently and effectively enable them to manage their projects. At the same time, the organizational structures which they developed were also vehicles to facilitate the participation of community residents. Managing these dual aims was, without exception, difficult.

A variety of creative strategies were employed to bring community residents into the organizational structures. These included the use of food and social events, informal, casual and flexible ways of operating, and providing child care and transportation. In attempting to accomplish both meaningful resident participation and develop efficient organizational structures, it seems some sites placed more of their resources and creativity into the former:

This push and pull resulted in the [Steering Committee] putting more emphasis on these tasks (e.g., hiring a community worker rather than a project coordinator) than on developing policies and procedures. While organizational issues continued to be discussed, it was always done in relation to how residents would be involved. (site 1)

As well, attempting to develop efficient and credible organizations while encouraging resident participation at the same time appeared to be a difficult mix:

A commitment to community participation over the duration of the project requires making trade-offs in other areas of program operation (ie meeting timelines and overall efficiency). (site 1)

The other dynamic was an ambivalence about whether these projects are to be governed as independent organizations, or whether they should be under the auspices of existing organizations. All of the sites, to varying degrees, operated as though they were independent organizations. Through their decision-making groups, or sub-committees, most projects had some responsibility for many of the activities which a board would normally have such as finances and budgets, developing policies, and hiring. At the same time sponsor agencies in all but one site (2) continued to exercise all of the ultimate financial and legal accountability, and staff persons from

the sponsor agencies played a significant role in these areas for most of the Better Beginnings projects.

4.4 Resident Involvement in Project Governance

Given the commitment and efforts to involving residents, it is not surprising that in all of the sites residents occupied at least fifty percent of the positions on the projects' decision-making groups. This marks an increase from what was reported earlier in the *Resident Involvement Report* (Pancer & Cameron, 1993), where most sites had fewer than 50% resident participation on their decision-making groups. Two sites (sites 1 and 7) reported having exactly 50%; two sites (5 and 6) had 60%; two sites (3 and 4) had two-thirds; while site 2 had 85 - 100% residents.

Residents took on greater roles in the projects' governing bodies than in earlier years. For example, all seven sites reported that residents played roles as chairpersons, or co-chairs with agency representatives, on the decision-making groups. Further, several site reports gave examples where the participation of residents had obvious influences on important project decisions. Despite these accomplishments, however, most of the sites reported that recruiting and maintaining resident participation was an ongoing challenge.

Consistent with what was reported in the *Resident Participation Report* (Pancer & Cameron, 1993), residents who were involved in the projects experienced many positive benefits from their participation. As well, the projects made progress in reducing the barriers to participation which were also described in the 1993 *Resident Participation Report*. Residents have grown more comfortable participating in these projects and report feeling less intimidated working together with agency representatives and project staff:

“...it's like there are stages to encounter and the first step is to break the barriers that seem threatening The second step is to bring the people to find confidence in themselves ... sometimes people need to be pushed in the beginning, so they may become confident in themselves, but once this has started, they realize all of which they are capable of doing and they identify themselves to the project And when all of this is done ..., it is time to start working with everyone, to supply the material, so the people may continue on their own “ (site 7)

Nevertheless, barriers to participation remain. Despite the gains made, comments from at least five site reports suggest that the challenges of resident participation in an empowering fashion still exist:

“I don’t have the experience or the whole mind to see the whole picture [in reference to incorporation] This is a really major decision ... laying in hands of mine ... I’m a sheep led by a shepherd. (site 1)

“From talking with community people on the [decision making group] sometimes they don’t understand what is being said at all, the level of discussion, the words that are being used and it is very difficult to put your hand up and say “I don’t understand” Sometimes I wonder if there is enough sensitivity to really explaining things Like I will be sitting beside a member and they will whisper to me “I don’t have a clue what they are talking about” and I whisper back “neither do I”. ” (site 4)

While these experiences represent real challenges, overall the Better Beginnings projects have taken important steps towards meaningfully involving community residents on their organizational governing structures.

4.5 Service Agency Participation in Project Governance

Building Bridges: Service Provider Involvement in Better Beginnings, Better Futures (Cameron, Vanderwoerd, & Peters, 1995) described the ways in which service providers were involved in the local sites. Other than the role and relationship with the sponsor agency, service provider involvement in the demonstration projects was not directly examined in this report. Nevertheless, a number of sites reported that there were specific issues regarding the involvement of agencies in their organizational governing structures. At four sites, it was reported that there were concerns about the extent to which the projects could control or limit which agencies would be represented in their projects. Compared to the attention and efforts directed towards involving community residents, however, there were fewer concerns about agency involvement in governance, other than what is described in the subsequent section regarding the relationship with the sponsor agency.

5.0 DECISION MAKING ON PROJECT BOARD AND COMMITTEES

Three sites (1, 2, 5) reported that decision making was by consensus in principle and practice. Two sites (4, 7) reported that decision making was by more traditional majority voting methods, while one site (6) reported a mix of consensus and majority voting procedures. Site 3 originally made decisions by consensus but introduced a voting procedure in 1992 and reports a mix of consensus and majority voting for decisions. This represents a shift from when the original proposals were developed in 1990, when all the sites reported using some form of consensus decision making.

In all the sites, regardless of which style of decision making was used, the procedures were described as being linked to the values and principles of inclusiveness, particularly allowing neighbourhood residents an opportunity to participate in decision making:

“This is the first group I have been in that continually uses consensus. Because of this, I find it difficult now when it is not used in other places. I have a voice and would like people to hear it.” (site 2)

The decision making model now in place at Better Beginnings respects the initial local philosophy It still remains focused on the participation from all organizational levels. (site 7)

The articulation of these principles in all of the sites suggests that developing a method for decision making in which a number of different constituencies have an equal role is at the heart of all of the sites’ decision-making processes, whether consensus or some other style. Therefore, it would not be accurate to conclude that consensus decision making is the only way or the best way in which projects were able to involve community residents in decision-making roles.

A number of observations can be made about the procedures used in the sites for decision making. First, the focus on flexibility and informality around decision making in some sites seemed to result in a lack of clarity in how decisions were made, who should be involved, and who was responsible for decisions. As well, staff, particularly Project Coordinators, played a key role in decision making in three sites, usually in setting agendas or providing information to other decision-making members.

A number of challenges and difficulties around decision making were reported in all sites, including:

-
- much time was needed to include multiple groups (4 sites)
 - in consensus decision making, decisions could be “blocked” or held up by one or a few people against the wishes of the rest of the group (2 sites)
 - unclear lines of accountability and responsibility (2 sites)
 - inconsistent attendance from decision-making members (2 sites)
 - issues around resolving conflicts (2 sites) and handling conflicts of interest (3 sites)

Despite these challenges, four sites reported that most decisions and the procedures around them were easy and comfortable:

“I find it amazing that even the difficulties there, the number of people involved, the number of decisions that have been made and how well the program works, it’s still quite astounding to me, the number of people involved in the decision that have worked. (site 4)

In most cases ... reaching consensus at the [steering committee] and in the sub-committees is usually not difficult. (site 6)

6.0 STAFFING PROFILES

Table 6.2 shows the numbers of residents and non-residents employed at each site. Several patterns are evident from this table and Table 6.1 in the main *Project and Management Report*:

Table 6.2
NUMBERS OF RESIDENT AND NON-RESIDENT EMPLOYEES BY POSITION IN
BETTER BEGINNINGS, BETTER FUTURES DEMONSTRATION SITES

		Positions			
		Project Coordinators / Managers	Other Managers	Front-Line Staff	Total
Site 1	Resident	0	2	14	16
	Non-resident	1	3	5	9
Site 2	Resident	1	0	17	18
	Non-Resident	0	1	5	6
Site 3	Resident	0	0	8	8
	Non-Resident	1	2	14	17
Site 4	Resident	1	1	10	12
	Non-Resident	0	3	5	8
Site 5	Resident	0	0	5	5
	Non-resident	1	3	6	10
Site 6	Resident	0	0	11	11
	Non-resident	1	3	2	6
Site 7	Resident*	0	1	7	8
	Non-resident	1	3	14	18
Total	Resident	2	4	72	78
	Non-resident	5	18	51	74

* At this site Resident means a parent of a child at one of the involved schools.

- A substantial number of people are employed at each site:

Site	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Employees	25	24	25	20	15	17	26

- Many of these positions are part-time or contracts for limited levels of service. Most of these kinds of positions are held by residents.
- Overall, the site reports indicated that Better Beginnings, Better Futures had 75 residents hired compared to 77 non-residents. However, a much higher proportion of front-line staff were residents (57%) than management positions (15%).
- Most sites had formal education and management experience criteria for choosing Project Coordinators. A few also wanted community development experience. Six sites (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) had non-resident Project Coordinators and one (2) had a resident.
- Sites had between one and five management positions in addition to the Project Coordinator. Most sites sought formal education and management experience qualifications for these positions with the exceptions of sites 1 (except for the Child Care/Family Support team leader) and 2. Most of the managerial positions were occupied by non-residents (85%). In addition, these were typically full-time positions.
- 57% of front-line positions were held by residents. However, there were very large differences between the proportions of front-line positions held by residents across the various demonstration projects:

Site	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
% frontline positions held by residents	64	75	32	53	33	65	31

- In terms of proportion of front-line positions held by residents, sites can be roughly divided into two groupings:

53% - 75% (sites 1, 2, 4, 6)
 31% - 33% (sites 3, 5, 7)

Two cautions are in order in interpreting these patterns. At some sites, front-line employees were residents when first hired and later became non-residents. Also, resident and non-resident employees may have many social economic and daily living experiences in common.

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- Only sites 1 and 6 had many different ethnic and linguistic group members within their staffing complements. Site 2 incorporated a few different ethnic and linguistic group members as staff.
 - Based upon the numbers¹ of each type of front-line position at the sites, five sites (1, 2, 3, 4, 7) appear to be allocating most of their program staff resources to one or two program approaches.² Two sites (5, 6) do not appear to have a central focus to their program staff allocations. Most sites, with the exception of site 1, 4 and, to a lesser extent, site 2, have a broad range of types of workers engaged in different kinds of program activities. In addition, most sites appear to have supplemented their Better Beginnings, Better Futures programs with funding for program staff whose activities often appear to fall outside of the original Better Beginnings mandate.

Without a doubt, the levels of resident employment in Better Beginnings, Better Futures are exceptionally high for human service organizations. When resident involvement in demonstration project governance is added to the levels of resident employment, Better Beginnings, Better Futures clearly represents a unique opportunity to learn about the nature and impacts of resident participation and empowerment in prevention projects as well as human services in general. As the *Project Organization and Management Report* demonstrates, the emphasis put on resident involvement and empowerment have influenced all aspects of Better Beginnings, Better Futures project organization and management.

These staffing profiles also suggest that there may be important differences in the prevention programming strategies that have evolved at the various sites. This suggests that there is a need in our research to provide a clear description of each site's prevention philosophy and programming in order to properly understand the outcomes for each site.

7.0 VALUE-BASED PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Most demonstration sites have invested a great deal of time into clarifying how staff relations and management should be. Attempts to define and implement value-based project organization and management have had major impacts at most sites. However, the site reports also

¹These estimates should be accepted cautiously because of the risk in projecting the content of jobs from the available job titles.

² This may be less true at site 2 where child care workers may in fact be engaged in different kinds of activities (e.g. after school programs, nutrition programs etc.) and divided between different ethnic/linguistic groups.

suggest that there are differences between sites in the values emphasized and the extent to which these principles have guided project organization and management. Finally, the challenges of trying to implement value-based project organization and management have not been simple and not always well understood by those asked to participate.

8.0 AN EMPHASIS ON PROCESS

8.1 Requiring a Substantial Investment of Time and Effort

A characteristic of staff relations and management procedures at many of these demonstration sites has been the substantial amounts of time and resources invested into group processes between staff, between staff and managers, and among staff, managers and resident volunteers. However, there did appear to be substantial variation in the amount of time invested into group processes involving staff from site to site. For example, our calculations estimate that at site 2 the equivalent of at least two working months a year are spent in staff meetings. Staff participation in project governance meetings would be in addition to these meetings.³ This could represent one end of the staff participation continuum for these projects. At the other end might be site 4, from where, in response to an earlier draft of this report, the following feedback was received, “staff meetings are once monthly...it’s not clear that (the project) spends any more time in meetings than is necessary”. There were differences in the levels of investment into these processes at the other five sites.

8.2 Participatory Processes are Central to Prevention Project and Program Development

Perhaps the strongest reaction to an earlier version of this report was in relation to our suggestion that the emphasis upon process may have costs as well as benefits. For example, we wondered whether the process emphasis may lessen the concern with efficiency or take time away from the details of prevention programming. What became clear from this feedback was that the

³In response to an earlier draft of this report, the following feedback was received: meetings are used to train staff, to discuss issues, to do planning, discuss budgets and that, in total, meeting time represents less than 17% of staff time. (By our calculations, 17% would equal about two months a year of work time.)

participatory processes of creating and running the project organizations as well as the programs were seen as central to good prevention. It is evident that Better Beginnings, Better Futures cannot be described without understanding the pivotal role that participatory and empowerment processes play at the various sites. However, once again, it seems to be necessary to pay attention to the differences in how and how much these processes are emphasized at each site.

8.3 Process and Personal Development

In addition to demanding large amounts of time and resources, the process emphasis was characterized by particular approaches to staff relations and employee development. Particularly striking at most sites was the concern with the personal development of staff and, in some instances, a desire to be involved “with the whole person” and a nurturing approach to staff support and growth. For example:

“... one is the supportive environment. Staff felt that they could count on each other for support whenever it was required, this provided a profound sense of connectedness within the staff group ... There’s always a shoulder here that you can go and weep on.” (site 6)

At two sites (sites 2 and 3), the priority on personal development and nurturing seems to have led to an intentional blurring of the distinction between supporting employees and helping program participants in the project rationale. Staff development and support were seen as integral elements of the community prevention strategy:

At Better Beginnings, managers do not differentiate between staff and clients. The emphasis is on the individual support and empowerment regardless of the individual’s position in the project. (site 3)

A parallel to the emphasis upon staff support and development has been the priority given to staff training and education which was identified in some site reports. A central element to staff development was creating an environment in which people felt safe. Basic to this sense of safety was trust between participants and, for this purpose, the creation of positive personal relationships was considered essential, if not always in evidence at every site.

Among the elements seen as vital to people-centred project organization and management have been flexible procedures and egalitarian management structures and procedures. On the

other hand, confusion about responsibilities and overly complex methods of decision-making and work coordination have been among the most common sources of conflict and frustration at the demonstration sites. Whatever the merits of flexible and egalitarian project organization and management procedures, it is apparently easy to step over the line and create excessive ambiguity. With this ambiguity came conflict, distrust, and a loss of feelings of safety:

“... Some people viewed the inconsistency as necessary to respond effectively to different situations. It was a matter of being flexible. There were indications that inconsistency had its drawbacks as well, such as creating room for distrust and conflict between managers and between front-line staff and managers.” (site 1)

In response to the frustrations of excessive ambiguity and conflict within the projects, a common response at the demonstration sites has been to seek to establish clearer procedures and, in some instances, to simplify decision making, governance and management procedures. There has also been a pattern of developing or adopting more formal policies and procedures to guide decision making and participant behaviours.

9.0 RESIDENTS AS EMPLOYEES

Hiring residents was described as a priority at every demonstration site. Typically, resident employment was seen as an important aspect of empowering both those employed as well as their communities. It was also considered a way to increase the economic resources available to the host communities. In a few site reports, local residents were identified as having some unique advantages as employees:

“It is not like I’m a family visitor and this is my client, it’s like we’re both at the same level.... It’s things that you generally have gone through... you know what it’s like and you know how they’re feeling.” (site 6)

...ensures that staff wages, training, energy and leadership are more likely to stay in the community after work hours and after contracts end. (site 2)

The feedback from residents about their experiences as Better Beginnings, Better Future employees was consistently positive across sites. The most commonly expressed appreciations were for the opportunity to do work which they considered worthwhile and for their personal growth which they attributed to their work experience:

“I’ve learned. I’ve grown. This was the best thing I ever did. The project has moulded me... I would say that I had good instincts, abilities but the project just went deep and.. yanked them out to the surface ... it has brought me to the point where I know I can go anywhere in my community and actually do lots of stuff ... It’s been a life saver.” (site 6)

“...it is with seeing the results, but being empowered and taking on leadership roles and it is just so exciting...” (site 4)

“I have made a lot of friends ... the more people you know the more contacts you have ... this really makes you feel safe walking the streets. It is good for the kids to see us ... as a familiar face they know that they have a safe place to go...” (site 2)

While there were clearly benefits for those residents who were employed, hiring community residents was not without challenges for the projects. First, hiring residents was considered to have siphoned off some of the volunteer leadership available to the projects. As well, the competition for jobs sometimes created disappointment for those residents who did not get jobs. In addition, the projects had to confront the challenge of setting boundaries around neighbourhood employees work efforts and deciding if off-hour expectations should be different for resident and non-resident employees:

“Sometimes we feel like we have a certain code and that people have certain standards for us even when we’re not working.” (site 5)

Finally, in several site reports, concerns were voiced, usually by program supervisors and managers, about the suitability of the skills of some resident employees for their responsibilities and about the extra supervision challenges and training requirement of resident employees.

10.0 MANAGERIAL EXPERIENCES AND PROCESSES

10.1 Burden and Benefits

Several site reports (sites 1, 3, 6, 7) highlighted the pivotal importance of the Project Coordinator/Manager to the creation and the maintenance of their demonstration projects. The experiences, preferences and working styles of Project Coordinators/Managers seemed to account, in part, for the clear differences between sites:

[The Project Coordinator's] charisma, influence and her ability to cultivate a following have ensured that her ideological persuasion form the cornerstone of [the management approach at the project]." (site 3)

Most Project Coordinators had a people-centred approach to management and invested a good deal of energy to coordinate staff and programs and other stakeholders. In addition, the site reports described most of the Project Coordinators/Managers as having a heavy, expanding and, at times, onerous workload:

"...it is like there are many bosses. The instructions and the expectations come from many resources and you have to put it all together. It is an experience which definitely makes one grow." (site 7)

"The project coordinator is beyond reproach. She puts her heart and soul and I don't know how she is still here. She is stretched in so many directions like a piece of hot bubble gum..." (site 3)

Feedback to an earlier version of the cross-site report suggested that the burden for Project Coordinators/Managers was the most demanding during the early years of project development. While comments about an excessive burden were more prevalent for Project Coordinators/Managers, there were some echoing of these concerns along with others among other managers in two site reports (1 and 6). At the same time, however, there was some talk about the personal benefits of being a manager at a Better Beginnings, Better Futures demonstration site.

"... offers the possibility of experiencing many types of administrative methods and different approaches. From my point of view it is very pleasant. We acquire lots of experience since we have the latitude to try new things when we believe that they will work and to change them if they don't work." (site 7)

"I've always enjoyed it since the beginning, it is creative, never a boring moment ... sometimes I would like to have more time, not to have people bashing in my door. Always busy. I've learned a heck of a lot. I'm still earning and it's wonderful." (site 3)

While there are areas of agreement, the overall impression is that there may have been substantial differences in management methods, burdens and pleasures from site to site as there have been for many of the other topics discussed in this report. As stressed in the introduction to this report, there does not appear to be any single approach to project organization and management that characterizes every Better Beginnings, Better Futures demonstration site.

10.2 Staff Supervision and Education

Two of the site reports (sites 2 and 5) included strong statements that group or team supervision was the preferred approach for staff work coordination and, in some instances, for program design and development. Team supervision was supplemented by other staff and management meetings and by individual managers' monitoring of staff and programs. Sites 1 and 7 described a more formal, individualized approach to staff supervision. Individual staff performance appraisals were carried out in a fairly traditional manner at most sites.

10.3 Hiring

Hiring their complement of staff for the project was one of the first major challenges confronting demonstration sites and, in most sites, it was described as a huge and somewhat intimidating undertaking:

Assembling a team of staff persons was one of the largest challenges the project faced. As a new project, it had no established procedures or policies for hiring. (site 5)

... Schedules A and B were not approved until the end of '92 ... Once this was done the Government Committee indicated that project staff should be hired and the project should be operating by January 3, 1993. This put a great deal of stress on the project ... we're talking about hiring 4 - 5 positions within the next three weeks ... just before Christmas." (site 6)

At every site, residents were involved in the hiring process and, in some cases, a variety of other project stakeholders. Some sites also used non-traditional ways of advertising particularly for positions in which residents were more likely to be interested such as in local newspapers, posters and word-or-mouth. Only the site 1 report described any substantial concerns with staff turnover or dismissals.

11.0 HOST ORGANIZATION AND PROJECT INDEPENDENCE

11.1 Evolving Organizations

Project organization and management at these seven demonstration sites is clearly a work in progress. Organizational governance and management structures and procedures which have the potential to be reasonably stable over a period of years are not yet in place at most sites. Also,

at most sites, it is not clear what these project organizations will become in the upcoming years. It does seem that there is a trend towards clarifying procedures and adopting more formal policies and procedures.

11.2 Relations with Host Organizations

Four site reports (1, 4, 5, 6) indicated that relations with the host organization are governed by a written agreement with the project and two site reports (1, 5) said that the host organization is paid an administrative fee for their services for the project. Six projects (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7) had a single agency located within or working within their geographical area as the host organization. These hosts included a Children's Aid Society, two community health centres, a mental health/social agency, a neighbourhood community service agency and a native friendship centre. Generally relations with these host agencies were described in positive terms, although there were specific areas of tension at most sites. However, one site was located with a primary school with a school board as its host. This site reported far more extensive and ongoing difficulties in host-project relations than the other sites. This may be because a bureaucracy as large as a school board has less interest in and capacity to modify its procedures to accommodate a local project.

Most demonstration projects received a standard set of services from their hosts who signed legal agreements for the project, assumed responsibilities for finances and legal liabilities, provided accounting services and paid project employees and provided employee benefits, and offered administrative/managerial consultation and support. The amount of autonomy of the project from the host organization varied from site to site and a number of site reports described some ambiguity about where the actual authority for major project decisions rested. Most host organizations had a representative on the project's governing body and selected governing committees. Use of project money to provide staff to enrich existing programs was done at several sites, but site 4 had a unique arrangement in which all of its staff were employed and supervised by existing agencies, in the end mainly by the host organization. Most of the other sites seemed to occupy an 'inbetween' space where, even though their staff were legally hired and paid by the host, they worked to a substantial extent following directions set by the project's governing

structures and in project-identified work teams. Most sites were obliged to or chose to adopt the personnel policies of the host organizations. At the end of the time period of this report, only site 2 had ended its legal and administrative reliance on a host organization and established itself as an independent project organization.

Every demonstration site has adopted some or all of the personnel and management policies of the host agency. Also, there was substantial variation in the extent to which the demonstration projects were considered to be part of the host agencies. It is also clear that at some sites there was confusion about what authority rested with the project and what power the host agency held over the project. In every case, except for site 2, the host organization continued to hold legal and financial responsibility for the demonstration project.

11.3 Demonstration Project Independence and Long-Term Survival

When the site reports were written, the expectation was that demonstration project funding would end in 1997. This expected instability has coloured project organization as site representatives sought ways for their initiatives to continue beyond the anticipated termination of Better Beginnings, Better Futures project funding. Solutions were sought in locating program staff in existing agencies in the hope that these agencies would continue to support them, in seeking additional sources of funding and in the establishment of the projects as legal non-profit corporations. Once again, we see different approaches being implemented at various demonstration sites. However, whatever the approaches tried, it did appear that Better Beginnings, Better Futures demonstration projects' survival at anywhere near their existing levels was unlikely at any location without a continuation of their base funding.

As of 1996, three demonstration sites had incorporated. Site 2 now administers its funds and delivers its programs without any affiliation with a host organization. Site 7 has created an independent corporation and indicated its desire to run all present activities through this new corporation, but has not begun to do so. Site 5 had incorporated but was expressing some ambivalence about severing its arrangements with its host agency. The other sites were at various points on a continuum between pursuing autonomy and being integrated into the host organization as one of its projects. Except for sites 2 and 7, the site reports suggested that there was not a clear

vision of a desirable long-term organizational status at any of these demonstration sites. With the acquisition of stable funding, the need to decide about the status of organizational structures for the demonstration-projects is likely to become increasingly necessary.

PART III

12.0 GENERAL THEMES AND PATTERNS

12.1 There are Important Differences as well as Similarities in the Various Sites' Approaches to Project Organization and Management

Not surprisingly, given the different settings and the broad mandates of the demonstration sites and the emphasis on participatory development process at each site, the demonstration sites have important differences in their approaches to project governance, involving residents⁴, staffing, management, relations with the host agency, project independence and long term survival. While there are important characteristics shared between most sites, it would be inappropriate to look at arrangements at any particular site as if they are representative of organization and management for all of Better Beginnings, Better Futures. While project language is often similar across sites, actual project organization and management methods show substantial variance in many areas. In our opinion, this points to the importance in our research of understanding each demonstration site separately before trying to draw conclusions about the overall demonstration project's organization and management.

In reaction to an earlier draft of this report, some respondents highlighted the need to identify the project organization and management similarities among the demonstration sites as well:

1. Each site has a group of trained community leaders.
2. Each site has designated sub-groups with distinct responsibilities.

⁴ Resident in this report refers to someone who would be a potential adult participant in the demonstration site's prevention programs. This might be a person within a geographic neighbourhood or a parent of a child attending a particular school.

3. Major decisions are made by consensus whenever possible⁵; some groups make decisions by consensus only.
4. All sites have a holistic vision for service delivery.
5. Each site has developed a process to ensure that community members have safe venues to participate.
6. Each has a staff leader. (Site 2)

While there are many differences between the sites in how each is managed, they all appear to remain true to some clearly defined principles of management and practice. (Site 5)

I too found that there existed more similarities than differences among the sites. All emphasized participation over what we may term efficiency... All sites consist of a volunteer board with 50% to 60% community participation; all have a commitment to consensus decision-making and each are working with the guiding principle of skills development. Another commonality...is their belief that community participants have a strong voice and have ownership of the project. Most sites (5 of 7) rely heavily upon their host organization and truly integrate services with them...(site 4)

As authors, we do not question these similarities. However, we do caution that there may be important differences in how things are done even in these areas of similarity. We maintain that it is necessary to understand each site on its own terms before concluding that there is a common Better Beginnings, Better Futures approach to project organization and management. We may find that the differences are as important as the similarities.

12.2 A Strong Commitment Based on a Firmly Held Belief in the Value of Better Beginnings, Better Futures

There is no doubt that many paid and volunteer participants have been very committed to Better Beginnings, Better Futures and they have invested a great deal of time and energy into creating these demonstration projects. This is true at all sites. It is also clear that these efforts often have been guided by strongly held principles and beliefs. At all sites, key participants have been motivated by the original prevention principles built into Better Beginnings. At most sites,

⁵ Note however, that the assumption from this quote, as well as the quote below from site 4, that all the sites make major decisions by consensus, is not consistent with what we found and reported about decision-making in Section 5.0 of this report. In fact, site 4 was one of the sites which DID not report making decisions by consensus at its main decision making group.

there has been a strong emphasis upon participatory development principles and processes. In addition, at some sites, participants' values about 'alternative' approaches to project governance, staff development and management have had a substantial impact upon how they wanted to carry out these activities. For example:

“... it is like we had to fall in love with the project ... to be able to work to do things.” (Site 7)

... the Project Coordinator taught magic tricks to the children, the Program Coordinator and the Administrative Secretary applied make-up ... before the Halloween party, the Family Visitor offered a cooking class, the Volunteer Coordinator gave a science workshop for recycling paper and the Community Developer was responsible for a music workshop. (Site 7)

This theme is one of the big elements of the project philosophy. The project chose a flat salary structure. The (Project) Coordinator now earns annually only \$4000 more than the community workers, she has twice refused a salary increase. (Site 2)

12.3 A Great Deal To Do

The mandate originally given to the demonstration sites, in combination with the expansions to these original objectives added by the sites, led to project ambitions that appeared to be greater than could have been satisfied within the time and with the resources available. As a result, these projects were still very much in the process of evolving at the time of these site reports. From our perspective, this activity 'overload' had several contributing factors:

1. Over a five year period, demonstration sites carried out a demanding agenda of neighbourhood/community development, the creation of a project organization, the management of this organization, the creation and maintenance of prevention programs and attempting to solve the problems of long-term survival after project funding was scheduled to end:

“(I've learned) how complex it is to try to manage a large project with so many government and research expectations and keep it sensitive and relevant to the people who live in the community ... I have also learned how political everything is - especially in terms of integration ...”(Manager, Site 1)

... four years is a brief period in relation to the ... objectives ... the vastness of the vision on which the project is based ... we believe that having attained a respectable growing rate, the local project has

now arrived at a crucial step ... the reinforcement of the program's performance and the gradual transfer of the programs to the community. (Site 7)

2. The original mandate for Better Beginnings, Better Futures charged the demonstration sites with three large and complicated undertakings:
 - (1) "The Integrated Model of Primary Prevention means that services to children must blend and unite. This goes beyond what is usually meant by coordination";
 - (2) Create "high quality programs ... characterized by careful attention to staff recruitment, training and development, staff participation ... child-staff ratios ... adequate staff compensation ... curriculum development and relating program activities to goals and objectives... provide time for all staff to develop close relations with the families and communities in which they work ... program components must be of highest quality, carefully matched to community needs and thoroughly integrated with each other component";
 - (3) The empowerment and involvement of residents in important aspects of project creation and management. (Request for Proposals: Research Sites, March 1, 1990).
3. At many sites, the projects added to the age-cohort focus originally suggested for Better Beginnings by creating programs and activities for older or younger children, families and adults and many sites have successfully solicited grants for programming beyond that funded by Better Beginnings.

This demanding level of activity has been added to by having many people at the demonstration sites learning for the first time how to do these things and/or by their determination to try to do things in new ways. One consequence of having a great deal to do may have been a need to make choices about the relative emphasis to be placed on different areas of activity. Another consequence may have been quite heavy burdens on the central figures in the demonstration projects, particularly Project Coordinators, most notably in the first few years of the demonstration project.

12.4 Participatory Processes as the Defining Characteristic

A central element of almost every demonstration site is the importance given to participatory and empowering processes of working with people or how people are to be involved in and cared for in the development of Better Beginnings, Better Futures. This process emphasis

has had two major consequences. First, a substantial amount of time, resources and energy has been invested at many sites in the processes of engaging residents, service providers and project staff in project creation and governance. Second, at most sites, there has been a substantial investment in personal development and nurturing for residents involved in project governance as well as for project staff. At some sites, the distinction between supporting program participants, resident volunteers and staff, particularly staff who are residents, seems to have been blurred intentionally to fit with how people believed that things should be done. These participatory and nurturing approaches have substantially influenced project organization and management at most sites and, in a few instances, form the core of an alternative vision of project organization and management. Finally, participation, empowerment and nurturing support in project organization and management, along with prevention programs, are presented as being essential to understanding prevention at these Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites.:

“... I find it amazing that even (with) the difficulties... the numbers of people involved.. how well the program works... (you) hear a lot of bitching... but when you look at what this program has achieved in three years and all the people involved, it is amazing!” (Site 4)

... Learning and sharing that the process of expanding integrated prevention services through community development is a primary course of change, not the services themselves. (Site 2)

... A process orientation means that a value-based process of achieving a decision is, in many ways, more significant to managers than the actual decision or end itself. (Site 3)

Internally, Management from Beside is process-driven and process-oriented. It promotes a caring, patient approach to supervision which is respectful of life circumstances and individual ability. The overall focus remains on people and the needs of people, rather than the administrative or bureaucratic needs of the organization. (Site 3)

Community development and project development processes at most sites are not seen solely as means of creating high-quality prevention programming, but as important prevention processes in their own right. In order to understand Better Beginnings, Better Futures prevention, these community/project development processes need to be seen as central. Once again, there

appear to be important differences across sites in the relative emphasis given to these development processes and how they are being put into effect. This points once more to the importance in our research of understanding the nature of each site before looking for patterns which characterize the overall Better Beginnings, Better Futures Demonstration Project.

A very high priority at most demonstration sites has been the involvement and empowerment of residents both as volunteer leaders and as project employees. These resident involvement and empowerment processes are areas where much has been learned at the demonstration sites and Better Beginnings, Better Futures has much to teach about what to expect and how to proceed with these participatory approaches. In particular, the Better Beginnings experience has shown the importance of time and patience, group processes, nurturing and personal development, training and education, developing personal relationships and trust, as well as clarity and simplicity in involving and empowering residents. Better Beginnings not only provides evidence of the benefits of resident involvement/empowerment, but clearly illustrates the complex challenges these processes represent. Participation and empowerment have costs as well as benefits.

One site (2) consistently stressed the process of resident involvement and resident/staff empowerment as the corner stone of a coherent alternative approach to project organization and management. This site also decided to eliminate the formal involvement of service provider organizations in the governance of the project. Most sites seemed to be seeking a balance, often with difficulty, between new, empowering, participatory approaches to volunteer resident and staff involvement and management and the need for more formal structures, policies and procedures.

12.5 Varied Patterns of Project Staffing

Between 15 and 26 people were employed at each site. Overall, 75 residents and 77 non-residents were employed by Better Beginnings, Better Futures sites at the time of the site reports. Compared to most social service organizations, this represents a very high level of resident employment in these projects. Most (57%) of the front-line positions were held by residents. Many of these positions were part-time positions. Also, the proportion of front-line positions held by residents varied between a high of 75% and a low of 31% across sites. Most (85%) of the

managerial positions were occupied by non-residents. These typically were full-time positions. Only two sites had many different ethnic and linguistic groupings within their staffing complement.

Five sites appeared to be allocating most of their program staff resources to one or two program approaches and two seemed to have many different kinds of program workers engaged in a variety of program activities. Most sites seemed to have supplemented their Better Beginnings, Better Futures budgets with external funding for programming outside of the original Better Beginnings mandate.

We draw two conclusions for our research from this information. First, once again, the data point to the need to understand each demonstration site on its own terms before looking for patterns which may hold true for all of Better Beginnings, Better Futures. Second, considering the differences across sites in program staffing profiles, the central importance of participatory processes at many sites, and the expanded prevention mandate at some sites, we need to look closely at each site in order to understand how they are approaching prevention and to situate their efforts in relation to the original terms of reference for Better Beginnings, Better Futures and the prevention literature.

12.6 “Inbetween” Organizations

The project organizations at the demonstration sites are evolving. What stable organizational forms eventually will be created at the various sites is unclear. It appears that most sites are gradually adopting more formal policies and procedures and some sites (2, 7) have moved towards clarifying and simplifying their governance and decision-making procedures.

Two sites (2, 7) had described a definite long-term organizational status that they wish for themselves. In both cases, the desire was to become an autonomous, incorporated community agency focusing on prevention. However, only one site (2) was operating its prevention initiatives as a separate corporation. The rest of the sites appeared to exist in a state in between seeing themselves as a project under the auspices of a host organization and wanting to have autonomous control over their policies and programs. Indeed, at most of these sites, there appeared to be little clarity about what a desirable long-term organizational status for the demonstration project would

be. This ‘inbetweenness’ seemed to colour much of project governance and management at all but one site (2).

With the assurance of ongoing funding for the demonstration projects, decisions about stable, long-term organizational mandates and structures are likely to become more necessary. Even though there was active involvement of community and service organizations in Better Beginnings at most sites, an earlier report, *Building Bridges* (Cameron et al., 1995), provided little evidence that Better Beginnings, Better Futures will serve as a vehicle for the organizational and legal integration of multiple existing services and agencies. From our perspective, at present, there seem to be two long-term organizational options for the demonstration sites. They can incorporate as autonomous, non-profit organizations or function as projects under the legal, financial and administrative auspices of a host organization. Current ‘inbetweenness’ (having ambiguous project autonomy without final administrative, financial or legal responsibilities) may not be satisfying or sustainable in the years ahead. It now becomes possible at each demonstration site to decide what organizational arrangement will make sense in the long run and to begin to move in that direction.

12.7 Concluding Remarks by the Authors

It is clear to us that Better Beginnings, Better Futures is an extraordinarily complex undertaking. It is also a project to which active participants have shown very high levels of commitment and about which they have presented strong beliefs about how project organization and management should be. A great deal of pride was shown in what has been accomplished as well as a clear sense of community ownership of the projects. Participatory and empowering project creation and management processes were identified as fundamental to site organization and management as well as to good prevention at most sites. We are of the opinion that Better Beginnings, Better Futures has a great deal to teach others about these participatory and empowering processes. It was also evident that a tremendous amount of effort and persistence was required to create these demonstration projects. We would like to highlight what for us became two major implications for the future project research emanating from this particular study:

- Better Beginnings, Better Futures is an original undertaking. It has evolved over time to take its specific form of project organization and management as well as prevention

programming. At this point in time, it would be hard for the two of us as researchers to describe what reasonable expectations for project outcomes would be for the demonstration sites. We see a need to engage each site in explaining to us their overall approach to prevention as a guide to our understanding as researchers of the nature of Better Beginnings, Better Futures.

- For us, this report highlights the need to consider each site separately before assuming there are standard approaches to project organization, management or programming for Better Beginnings, Better Futures. This is not meant as a criticism. It is simply a recognition of the evolutionary character of Better Beginnings, Better Futures and the different community settings in which the projects have been created.

Better Beginnings, Better Futures has been an extraordinary learning experience for many active participants. In our experience, it is unlike any other prevention project or community development initiative. There is much that Better Beginnings, Better Futures has to teach others and we feel privileged as researchers to have the opportunity to try to understand this prevention project. It is in that spirit that this report is presented and we hope that it will be useful.

13.0 REFERENCES

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