



## NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

Building the Evidence – EVALUATION SUMMARIES

2007-ES-2

# BOUNDLESS ADVENTURES PROJECT

Boundless Adventures was a crime prevention initiative aimed at high-need, under-resourced families with children aged 2 to 6 years in Ontario. The goal was to promote the development of children by fostering healthy parent-child relationships. The project provided early and intensive support to young high-risk families by:

- strengthening family bonds
- improving parenting skills
- ensuring long-term community support to families



Boundless Adventures combined outdoor education with family therapy and was delivered in two phases:

**Phase one:** Recreation and wilderness trips were used as a critical component in the family rehabilitation process. The purpose was to promote family bonding, enhance self-esteem for parents, create positive and lasting peer group relationships and help form the basis for regular and pro-social family activities. This phase took place at a 600-acre wilderness facility located in the Ottawa Valley region of Eastern Ontario.

**Phase two:** Families from Toronto and Ottawa participated in a range of group-based parent-children activities in the community, such as recreational outings, social events, parent support groups and workshops. Participating families also received individual family support when needed.

## Project assessment

A process and outcome evaluation was conducted. In the process evaluation, reports were used to improve and modify the project as required. This was supplemented by case studies used to identify specific types of change experienced by the families.

The outcome evaluation was based on a quasi-experimental design that included a comparative group analysis. Each participant completed a questionnaire along with an interview and a testimony prior to their participation. Each measure was re-administered at the end of the project.

Although a comparison group of 26 families participated in the evaluation it was found that they were dissimilar to the participating families in several ways. First, comparison families were classified as at-risk but they had significantly fewer and less severe difficulties than participating families. Second, 49% of comparison families were attending a specialized preschool program where the parents and children received individual support. The evaluation team attempted to address some of these issues by comparing families with high and low attendance rates and by examining the accuracy of the data that had been collected for both groups.

## Key findings

The process evaluation revealed that:

- The interventions for families identified as at-risk were successful.
- The project reached its target population with 100% of participants meeting the screening requirements.
- The project was well defined and implemented.
- The activities offered were both coherent and consistent over the three-year period.
- Attendance rates were high and increased steadily each year.
- Although a number of families did not participate beyond phase one, the project did not lose those families whose children were most-at-risk for criminal behaviour.



The outcome evaluation indicated that:

- The project was an effective intervention for improving parent-child relationships, childrens' social functioning and families' levels of community involvement.
- 87% of parents felt their children developed new skills as a result of the project.
- 79% of parents and 89% of agency staff believed the project benefited childrens' social skills.
- 69% of parents and 81% of agency staff felt the project increased the emotional functioning of children.
- 87% of agency staff felt that the program helped parents feel as though they belonged to a supportive peer group.
- 96% of parents reported benefits from the project such as: enhanced feelings of self-esteem and self confidence, supportive new relationships, greater awareness of their children, development of better parenting skills and improved bonding with their children.

## Lessons learned

A number of important lessons were learned:

- The two stages of the project (challenge-based wilderness programming and community development and relationship building) required different staff members with distinct skills and levels of training.
- Adult programs are revitalizing for parents as it helps them feel more emotionally available to their children.
- A flexible approach to programming and goal setting is a critical component of the program's success.
- The staff's ability to create feelings of safety among participants is critical to the program's success.
- The opportunity for timely exploration of negative patterns proved to be extremely valuable to families struggling with these problems and their underlying attachment issues.
- Key successful components of the project included: 'Discovery times' when parents were encouraged to allow their children to take the lead in free-time activities, sharing with other parents the memorable experiences they had with their children, forming trusting connections with members of the community, adopting a flexible approach to programming and adapting the program to the specific needs of each family.

## Conclusion

The Boundless Adventures project provided children with new skills and did help create supportive peer groups for their parents. While a number of families did not participate beyond phase one, the project did provide services to the families and children who were most at risk.

To increase the support of children and families at risk, it appears vital to offer a combination of counseling, therapeutic recreation and community support. It is also important to promote alternatives to drug use among youth and strengthen the bonds between families and communities.

*For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre at 1-877-302-6272, or visit our website at: [www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc)*

*You can also visit the website of Boundless Adventures at: <http://www.boundlessadventures.org/>*