



## NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

Building the Evidence – **EVALUATION SUMMARIES**

**2007-ES-15**

# PROJECT EARLY INTERVENTION

Project Early Intervention (PEI) provided support to high-risk children and youth aged 6 to 12 years, living in a high-needs social housing neighbourhood in Ottawa, Ontario, between 1999 and 2003. The participating community included a large proportion of recent Arabic and Somalian immigrants. The PEI project was initially managed by the Ottawa Police Service's Youth Centre, which merged with the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa in January, 2002.



By offering a life skills development program, homework club, sports and recreation opportunities and ongoing support, PEI sought to increase participants' resiliency to risk factors related to criminal behaviour. Specifically, the project's expected outcomes were as follows: increased school attendance, reduced crime, violence, anti-social behaviour and calls to police for service.

Priority was given to children and youth who:

- Had a sibling or parent involved in the criminal justice system;
- Were living in homes affected by domestic violence; and/or
- Were engaged in behaviour likely to result in charges under the Young Offenders Act (since changed to Youth Criminal Justice Act) were they of the age of criminal responsibility (more than 12 years old).

## Project assessment

Process and outcome evaluations were conducted. The comparison population was composed of individuals who were placed on a waiting list. The members of this waiting-list control group were exposed to the program's supporting elements such as sports and recreation activities, and the homework club but were not participants in the project's life skills component. The evaluation sought to determine whether the life skills component had an impact on the children and youth's behaviours.

Evaluation findings reported on 100 children: 82 from the intervention group and 18 from the comparison group.

## Key findings

The process evaluation showed that:

- The sports and recreation component gave participants the chance to use the life skills they learned in the classroom;
- Sports, recreation and homework club programming are excellent outreach tools, particularly if implemented in communities that lack existing programming.

The basic factors identified for successful project replication included:

- Community presence;
- A strong and stable management team;
- Well-articulated and strictly enforced rules of conduct;
- Proper analysis of community needs and existing services;
- Comprehensive, varied and fun outreach programs;
- Strong life-skills program delivered by qualified personnel experienced in early childhood education;



- A well-monitored and enjoyable homework club;
- A strong communications program;
- Community partnerships.

The outcome evaluation showed that:

- The comparison group showed improvements while on the waiting list despite being exposed only to the sports and recreation programs, but they showed significant improvements when they entered the project's life skills component;
- Improvements were recorded among youth in the areas of aggression/acting out, irresponsibility/inattentiveness, being socially withdrawn and fearfulness/anxiety;
- Life skills is a very important component of PEI. Evaluation findings showed that it is more effective to link life skills with structured sports, recreation and other supporting programs in order to provide an environment where youth can practice what they have learned.

## Lessons learned

Lessons learned included:

- Community, school and parental involvement are critical to the success of the program. Participants with involved and committed parents benefited the most from the program;
- Staff commitment and continuity are essential in providing appropriate support and services in high-risk communities;
- Varied activities are important so that children who have different interests and needs will be attracted to these programs;
- Most community members were of Arabic or Somali descent, and neither English nor French was their primary language. In such cases, the program must plan to facilitate language and translation requirements.

## Conclusion

Project Early Intervention (PEI) is a promising crime prevention initiative for children and youth at-risk. The project contributed to building knowledge of recreational and life skills programs that help youth become positive members of the community.

*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).*

*For more information on the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, visit their website address at: [www.bgcottawa.org/default.asp](http://www.bgcottawa.org/default.asp).*

*If you wish to register for the NCPC mailing list to receive information from the Centre please visit the subscription page at: [www.PublicSafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/maillinglist/subscribe-en.aspx](http://www.PublicSafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/maillinglist/subscribe-en.aspx).*