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Promising results from an evaluation of Family TIES

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Family TIES is a multi-family group program designed to support the families of youth participating in Aggression Replacement Training (ART), an evidence-based cognitive-behavioural intervention for aggressive youth (Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 1998). Family Ties was developed at BYFC by Robert Calame and Kim Parker by adapting ART activities to a series of parallel group meetings designed to help the youths' families support and reinforce the core ART intervention, with the aim of improving youths' behaviour, social competency and family functioning. For the first 4-5 weeks, parents meet to discuss parenting issues and to practice role-playing techniques in preparation for coaching their youth. For the remaining 7-8 weeks, youths and parents meet in a multi-family setting. Each session runs for two hours. Most groups are composed of four to six families. According to Robert Calame; "The factor of most importance is that parents have a level of interaction with the youth that will support the targeted transfer of learning."

The program is coordinated centrally at BYFC; Family Ties sessions are led by BYFC staff members trained as Family TIES animators. Unit managers, in consultation with animators, decide which families would benefit from the intervention. Animators are then responsible for inviting family members to participate in the program. Family TIES is offered to BYFC clients followed under the Youth Protection Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (by recommendation of the court) and the Health and Social Services Act. In addition to the youth and parents, significant others may also participate: biological, adoptive, foster, or step-parent, partners, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc. In the study described below, the term "parent" refers to the participating adult. The intervention can occasionally include younger or older siblings when appropriate.

FAMILY TIES EVALUATION

Building on the positive feedback received by parents, youth and staff, a group of BYFC staff involved with Family Ties collaborated with academics with expertise in the evaluation of family and youth intervention programs to develop a detailed manual describing the Family Ties intervention. Subsequently, with the support of funds from the Centre for Research on Children and Families, a series of studies were initiated to: (1) document the implementation of Family TIES, (2) assess the quality of the program from the point of view of participants and staff, (3) gather information on recruitment, demographics of clientele, attendance, attrition, and adherence to protocol, and (4) examine change in process measures (e.g. attitude, skillstreaming).

The current study was designed to determine the extent to which youth and parents involved in the program reported improvements in behaviour, social competency and family functioning. Questionnaires were administered to both youth and parents on the first day of the program, and then again during a booster session that takes place a few weeks after the program. In addition to evaluating whether or not there was improvement in areas targeted by this intervention, the study sought to determine whether the research protocol was effectively implemented, identifying problems that might threaten the validity of the results.

Both the parent and the youth completed measures of youth functioning (Youth Self-Reports; YSR and Child Behaviour Checklist; CBCL), youth anger (State Trait Anger Expression Inventory- 2; STAXI-2), and family functioning (The McMaster Family Assessment Device; FAD). Youth also completed the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS). Parents assessed their own anger and their parenting practices (Alabama Parenting Questionnaire; APQ). First and

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foremost, we were interested in whether there would be improvements in the youths' aggression and anger level, as well as in family functioning.

RESULTS

Information was gathered from 58 families.

Based on statistical analyses of the change in parent and youth reports from pre to post intervention (Time 1 -Time 2 t-tests), statistically significant improvements were found on key measures. According to youth and parent reports, youth were rated as having lower levels of aggression, anger, and other problems at the end of the program, as compared to before (see Figure 1). Youth also gave higher self-control (SSRS) ratings and appeared to be more satisfied with the assignment of roles within the family. After the program, parents reported lower levels of anger and fewer problems related to supervising their children, and sweeping improvements in family functioning (Figure 2).

Generally speaking, more positive changes were found in the perceptions of the parents as compared to those of the youths. A greater number of significant findings and larger effect sizes were noted in the analyses of parent reports. That said, comparable results were found in youth aggression, rule breaking, somatic problems (YSR/CBCL), anger reaction (STAXI), and family roles (FAD).

Not all the results were positive. The Family TIES program includes activities that are specifically designed to improve anger control. The youth did not report improvement in this area; however, parents did perceive progress in the anger control skills of their children.

A quarter of participants voluntarily withdrew from the program, and a further 32% did not complete both the pre and post questionnaires. We verified whether the more vulnerable families had dropped out at a higher rate, but found no evidence that non-completers represented a higher risk group in terms of demographic characteristics, youth aggression and family functioning.

Finally, we examined whether the changes in the youth were consistent across gender and age categories. Comparable improvements were found for males and females in terms of YSR/CBCL aggression, rule breaking, and social problems, but only females reported a reduction in somatic problems. Also, the reduction in anger (STAXI) reported by females was more pronounced than that of

males. Looking at change by age, parents with older adolescents reported larger improvements in anger and rule-breaking, as compared to those of parents of younger adolescents.

Table 1.

Change in Youth Behaviour (YSR/CBCL) and Anger (STAXI).

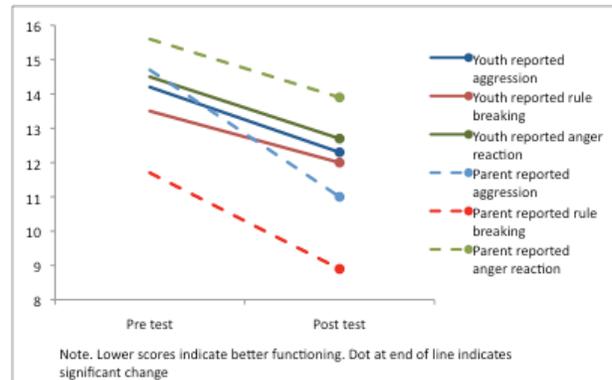
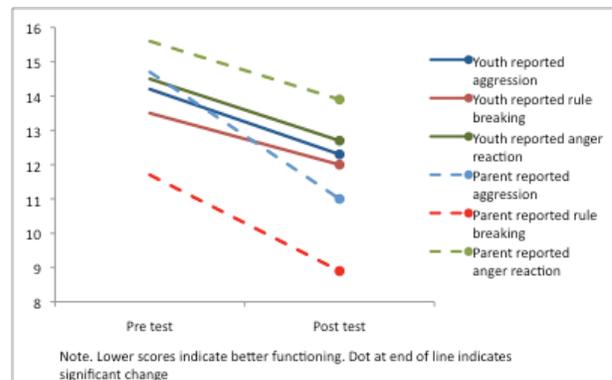


Table 2.

Change in Family Functioning (FAD).



SUMMARY

The results of this first Family TIES evaluation are promising, as evidence of change was noted at the youth, parent and family levels. The indication is that the skills learned by parents and youth provide them with a means of controlling aggressive behaviours and related problems. These positive results warrant a follow-up study using a comparison group to determine the extent to which these changes can be attributed to the intervention. It is hoped that the information collected will be helpful

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Promising results from an evaluation of Family TIES *(cont'd from page 2)*

to professionals, parents and the general public, in our collective efforts to minimize aggressive behaviours among youth receiving protective services, and help promote peaceful conflict resolution strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Stephen Ellenbogen, Memorial University professor and member of the CRCE, was lead investigator for the Family Ties evaluation. A number of other researchers participated at various stages of the development and evaluation of program: Nico Trocmé, McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families; Nadine Lanctôt and Marie-Josée Letarte, Université de Sherbrooke; Denis Lafortune, Université de Montréal and Johanne Proulx (BYFC). The evaluation was coordinated by a BYFC steering group including Claude Laurendeau, Robert

Calame, and Nick Paré. Crucial to the success of this project were the many animators, coordinators, and university students who delivered the program, administered the questionnaires, and entered the data. Funding for the lead evaluator and students was provided by the Centre for Research on Children and Families. Of course, this evaluation would not be possible without the collaboration of nearly a hundred parent and youth clients. All of these people deserve a hearty thanks. [ITK](#)

References

Goldstein, A. P., Glick, B., & Gibbs, J. C. (1998). *Aggression Replacement Training: A comprehensive intervention for aggressive youth* (rev. ed.). Champaign, IL, US: Research Press.

Leaving Home, Leaving Care: Preliminary Results of a Qualitative Study

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This study compares the experiences of youth leaving home to those leaving care. The goal of the research is to identify developmental turning points and assets that support healthy transitions to residential autonomy. The project was made possible by the participation of staff and clients of Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, and the support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Thirty young people in the community and twenty youth from care in transition to independent living have been interviewed about their moving out experiences. The study uses Consensual Qualitative Methodology (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1995) to track themes between and across interviews. This is a summary of the first wave of findings.

Initial results suggest that moving out is a disorganizing experience for all young people, which with time can evolve to adaptation. One assumption driving this research was that when young people choose to leave home, the transition is less daunting than when youth age out of care. Home leavers in this study described the transition to independent living as a crisis fraught with unanticipated anxieties. Worries about money were compounded by loneliness, feelings of being overwhelmed and an initial loss of self-control. Most stated that no amount of preparation would have helped them deal with the dramatic impact of leaving. These reports resemble the experiences of youth leaving care documented in

earlier research and those of the care leavers in the current study. A unique feature of the transition out of care, however, is that anger exacerbates the crisis.

There were stabilizers in the lives of youth leaving home that eased their transition and contributed to adaptation over time. Participants who had been on their own prior to moving, even for a short trip, weathered the initial crisis more easily. The awareness that family would step in if things really deteriorated was cited as a significant stabilizer although, most participants did not wish to turn to their parents. They relied instead on peers for advice and support. This is significant because it has been documented that youth leaving care are often isolated from their peers. Care leavers interviewed were adamant that they did not want to turn to staff once they had moved, and those who had a supportive peer network seem to have experienced a less tumultuous transition.

These preliminary results have implications for intervention. Expectations for youth leaving care should be re-evaluated. The transition to independent living is a normative crisis for all young people, which inevitably disrupts the individual's level of functioning. While most agencies provide programs of preparation, it may be that the provision of intensive support during the actual move for all youth exiting care can contribute more to long term adjustment. Even short leaves from care could allow a

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Preliminary Results of a Qualitative Study *(cont'd from page 3)*

young person to experience being on his/her own. An emphasis on building peer connections in cohorts of youth leaving care is essential. Not only can it compensate for the lack of family support; it utilizes a natural resource without necessitating additional funding or major changes in programs. This study will be completed by the fall of 2012 and a more detailed report will be available at that time. [ITK](#)

References

Hill, C., Thompson, B., & Williams, E. (1997) A guide to conducting Consensual Qualitative Research. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 25(4), 517-572.

Program Highlight

Ensuring Qualification and Independence Program (EQIP) *(Programme qualification des jeunes)*

- Created in 2001 by the ACJQ to prepare Centres Jeunesse youth in care for adult life;
- Established in Batshaw in 2002; it built upon the existing program 'Support Link';
- Designed for Youth aged 16 who have a long history of placement and a poor/limited social support network; they are followed by the same educator up until the age of 19;

YEAR 1: Focus is on relationship and trust building; preparation; education and preliminary goal-setting.

YEAR 2: With a relationship that has been solidified, life skills' acquisition moves from the preparation/discussion phase to more "hands-on" intervention. It is a time for doing and putting teaching/learning into practice.

YEAR 3: Focus is on support and "passing the bâton" by supporting the youth's transition to independent, community living. This includes helping him/her ensure that he/she has a strong social network that will provide emotional and practical supports that will remain in place on a long-term basis.

Did you know?

First Nations Children Overrepresented in Child Welfare across Canada

by Nico Trocmé, McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families

Kiskisik Awasisak: Remember the Children, the first report of the First Nations Component of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 (FNCIS-2008), was released by the Assembly of First Nations in November of 2011. The report, the largest study of child welfare services involving First Nations children ever conducted in Canada, compares the characteristics of First Nations children and families investigated in 89 provincial/territorial agencies and 22 First Nations and urban Aboriginal agencies during the fall of 2008. Youth Centres in Québec, including BYFC, participated in data collection. The report found that in 2008 in the population served by the sampled agencies, First Nations children were **4 times more likely to be investigated** – 140.6 investigations for every 1,000 First Nations children compared to 33.5 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children – and were **12 times more likely to come into care** during the investigation – 13.6 investigations involving formal child welfare placements for every 1,000 First Nations children compared to 1.1 for every 1,000 non-Aboriginal children. In comparing the characteristics of First Nations children and their families investigated in the sampled agencies to the investigations involving non-Aboriginal children, the study found that First Nations families faced more difficulties related to a range of problems, including poverty, housing, lack of social support, substance misuse, and domestic violence.

Copies of the report and information sheets related to the study can be downloaded from the Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal at <http://cwrp.ca/fn-cis-2008>.

Sinha, V., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Fast, E. Thomas Prokop, S., et al (2011). *Kiskisik Awasisak: Remember the Children. Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in the Child Welfare System*. Ontario: Assembly of First Nations.

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