

Connections – TLC³ Vancouver EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Program Description

The TLC³ Project in Vancouver was a partnership of the Vancouver Infant Development Programme, Developmental Disabilities Association, and the Alan Cashmore Centre, Vancouver Community Mental Health Service of the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. Staff from each of these organizations worked in partnership with staff of Kiwassa and Collingwood Neighbourhood Houses to provide the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program and Developmental Screening for parents and infants and parents and toddlers. The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program is a group experience for family members in a parenting role and their babies and young children focusing on the pleasure and power of using rhymes and songs and telling stories together. The program was offered for 30 sessions each year for five years. Families participated in the parent-infant Parent-Child Mother Goose Program until their child was two years old.

In the last two years of the project, parents who had become trained as leaders also ran Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs for toddlers through the TLC³ Vancouver Project. Families participated in the parent-toddler Parent-Child Mother Goose Program when their child was between two and three and a half years old. In addition, all families were offered the opportunity to use a developmental screening provided by the registered speech-language pathologists who were working for the Project. The developmental screening was provided to families: 1) when they began in the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, 2) when they left the program, and 3) a year after they left the program.

In total, 356 Parent-Child Mother Goose Program sessions were provided to 174 families across the 5 years of the TLC³ Vancouver Project. Developmental screening was provided that least twice to 106 families.

The TLC³ Vancouver Project worked closely with the National Office of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program to develop a regional office for the organization. The Infant Development Programmes of BC supported the TLC³ Vancouver Project by sponsoring and coordinating training and workshops about the program through its in-service education program. Two of the leaders in the TLC³ Vancouver Project obtained training to train leaders for the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. This training continued after the TLC³ Vancouver Project.

In the final three years of the project, "Gatherings" were offered through the TLC³ Vancouver Project twice a year to provide continuing education and support to Parent-Child Mother Goose Program leaders running programs in the lower mainland.

An Advisory Committee played a very important role in the development of the project and subsequently in the planning and implementation of the evaluation of the project. Dana Brynelsen, Provincial Advisor for the Infant Development Programmes of BC was the chair of the committee which had representatives from parents, Health, Mental Health, the Neighbourhood Houses, and the TLC³ Vancouver Project.

Summary of Evaluation Findings

The project was evaluated from 1999-2002. Fifty-four families (56 children) participated in the evaluation. Of the 54 families, 24 were seen for follow-up a year after they finished in the project. Measures were completed with the children, the parents, the staff in the project, and the administrators of the Neighbourhood Houses. The measures included the Communication Symbolic Behavior Scales- Developmental Profile (CBCS-DP) to assess children's language and communicative skills. The parent questionnaire was completed by the parents when they began the program and when their participation ended. The SLP's also administered a face-to-face evaluation of the children at the beginning and end of the families' participation in the program. The CBCS-DP parent questionnaire and behaviour sample has three domains – Social, Speech, and Symbolic – with several subcategories looking at sound and speech development, play development, and gesture and pragmatic development.

The results of the CBCS-DP parent questionnaire for 51 children show that the children demonstrated significant gains, relative to norms, on the speech subscale, the symbolic subscale and the total scale. The results of the CBCS-DP behaviour sample conducted by the SLP's show that the children demonstrated significant gains for all three subscales (speech, symbolic and social) and the total scale. Both children with normal development and language delays demonstrated significant gains. The children with identified difficulties attended the program longer and used additional therapy services recommended by the registered speech-language pathologists who worked in the project. Thus, the program offered something for all of the children.

The parents were administered a semi-structured interview to elicit their feedback about the program and its benefits. The parents rated the program as being very satisfactory. They reported benefits for themselves and their children. They also reported that their experience in the program gave them a sense of community and support and stated that a year later they had maintained friendships with people they had met in the program. As well, the parents reported that the program had provided their children with a positive first social experience and some parents felt it had given their children more confidence in social situations.

Parents liked some aspects of the project better than others. Within the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, they enjoyed learning and using the songs and rhymes. They found the story learning was not as enjoyable. It was concluded that it was the performance anxiety associated with the solo retelling of a story that caused the

discomfort as the great majority of parents reported enjoying being told the stories by the leaders. How to teach and support the learning of storytelling continued to be an area worth exploration by the National Office of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program.

Within the Developmental Screening program, 75% of parents reported this had been a useful experience that had provided them with information about their children's development and ideas of ways to promote the next phases of communication and language development. The families who were referred for therapy services for their children (10 families) reported that the help from the leaders and registered speech-language pathologist had been supportive and useful. They all reported satisfaction with the current interventions for their children. The Developmental Screening required little time and was very effective in identifying children and supporting families.

The staff in the project completed a questionnaire about their experience of leading the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program at the end of every 10 sessions. Over the period of the evaluation of the TLC3 Vancouver Project, 9 leaders were involved in leading groups. An additional 7 parents were also running Parent-Toddler Mother Goose Programs. All of the leaders indicated that being a leader in this program was very satisfying, that they had grown personally and professionally, and valued seeing the pleasure of parents supporting the growth of their children through this kind of activity. The leaders of the parent-infant Parent-Child Mother Goose Program had all assumed positions of greater responsibility in their agencies by the conclusion of the TLC3 Vancouver Project.

Administrators of the Neighbourhood Houses were interviewed at the conclusion of the project. They reported that the experience of participating in the project had been positive. They saw growth in the staff and valued the programs offered by the Project. The two Houses had quite different experiences in working with the administration of the project. In one House things went very smoothly from start to finish. In the other House, the project had many growing pains and all participants learned a great deal about communication and working across different systems of administration. Both Houses were highly regarded in the community and they reported that their involvement in the TLC3 Vancouver Project confirmed their commitment to quality programs. A decision was made by both of the Houses to continue offering the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program for parents and infants and to expand the program to offer a program specifically for First Nations families as well.

Overall Impact

The result of having the TLC3 Vancouver Project in Vancouver was powerful and had impacts on many levels. Everyone connected with the overall project and the evaluation experienced pleasure and personal growth and described the project as enhancing a sense of community and a support network.

What began as one site in east Vancouver developed into many Parent-Child Mother Goose programs all over the province. The results provided a confirmation that play with rhymes, lullabies, songs and stories was a joyful experience for parents with their young children no matter where they lived or the circumstances of their lives. No bells and whistles or special props were needed to facilitate this time together and the growth of community that came from the experience for most of the parents. What was required was skilled leaders who were sensitive to the importance of relationships, who were knowledgeable about child development and the challenges of parenting in the early years, and who had a love of singing, storytelling and other play with language. Skilled leaders with sufficient time to prepare for the program, connect with families outside of the program and debrief after each session ensured that families valued this experience and saw it as a significant experience for themselves and their children.

As stated above, the child participants who had typical development demonstrated growth in their social communication, symbolic and language skills. The child participants who had language delays, language disorders, or developmental disabilities demonstrated growth in their speech and symbolic and language skills. Fourteen children were referred to the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority for speech and language services or to the Vancouver Infant Development Programme for support. Parents reported finding a social network that had been sustained beyond their time together in the project.

A number of individuals were trained in Parent-Child Mother Goose. Nine parents became qualified as Parent-Child Mother Goose Leaders and went on to run programs. Two child minders also completed the training and went on to run programs. Over 950 other people were trained as program leaders in the province of BC. Programs were now running all over the province. "Gatherings" were offered for continuing education and support to leaders. The program was known to administrators of education, social services, health, mental health, library science, infant development, and government officials.

Funding was obtained for a Provincial Coordinator of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program as well as for two mentoring sites because of the broad knowledge of this program in the community and the high regard it had received from parents and professionals. This funding was short term. Ultimately, there is a need for government funding to ensure these programs are sustained. Administrators at the level of the municipal governments and coastal health authorities knew this was a program to promote.

The Developmental Screening was not continued subsequent to the project due to cutbacks within health care. This had been an important piece of the TLC3 Vancouver Project for most of the families and in particular for the 10 families whose children were

identified and subsequently seen for therapy while they were still infants. The evaluation outcomes should be sufficient argument for the provincial government to consider the funding needed, particularly as this was not a time intensive service to provide.

This project provided many different people with an enriching, life changing experience. It impacted at the level of individual participants and at the level of systems within the city of Vancouver and the province of BC. The TLC3 Vancouver Project, like its main program, the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, looked simple on the surface and yet had such depth that a powerful, sustained outcome had been the result.

Sustainability

As mentioned what began as one site in east Vancouver developed into many Parent-Child Mother Goose programs all over the British Columbia. Over 950 people were trained as program leaders in the province and "Gatherings" were offered for continued support to the leaders. As a result of this wide-spread training Parent-Child Mother Goose programs are now running all over the province.

Funding was obtained from The Vancouver Foundation, The United Way – Success By Six, the National Literacy Secretariat, the Lawson Foundation, and Vancouver Community Mental Health Services of Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. This funding paid for a provincial coordinator of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, secretarial support, continuing education for leaders, and two mentoring Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs at Kiwassa and Collingwood Neighbourhood Houses.

The coordination of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs in BC continued in an enhanced manner through the newly created Provincial Coordinator for Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs within the BC Council for Families as part of the regional development of the National Network of Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs. The BC Infant Development Programmes remained committed to supporting Parent-Child Mother Goose Program training and program operation throughout BC.

The Kiwassa and Collingwood Neighbourhood House parent-infant Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs was to be sustained for at least another year as they evolved into mentoring sites for the coordination of Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs in BC.

Two of the parent leaders are now running the Collingwood Neighbourhood House Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. The other parent leaders have moved on to other community activities and continued to form a community for themselves and other friends with children. Two of the childminders also received training and are running Parent-Child Mother Goose programs elsewhere in the community.

The continuing education and support to leaders is being continued by the Provincial Coordinator of Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs in BC through the BC Council for Families.

The two sites for the TLC3 Vancouver Project now have strong links to the Community Health Services at North and Evergreen Health Centres. They continue to help families in their programs with referrals for specialized services.

The Provincial Coordinator will be helping Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs around the province to connect with their community resources for young families.

New programs will continue to have support in getting started, obtaining information on possible funding sources, and consultation over their first year for the usual, and unusual, predicaments that present in running a program.