

Learning What Works

Evidence from SRDC's social experiments and research

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New report shows communities can help improve local development and capacity

Although Canada has enjoyed sustained economic growth for nearly 15 years, not all regions share equally in the benefits of these prosperous conditions. Indeed, there are still regions of the country where the unemployment rate exceeds twice the national average. Communities in these regions are faring much worse still, with the brunt of layoffs from a decline in local industry, often accompanied by significant out-migration further threatening local capacity. The longstanding interest among policy-makers in finding effective approaches to support vulnerable communities is therefore just as relevant today as it has been in less prosperous times.

The Community Employment Innovation Project (CEIP) is a demonstration project that is testing an alternative form of income transfer payment for the unemployed, which simultaneously encourages work and supports local community development. *Engaging Communities in Support of Local Development: Measuring the Effects of the Community Employment Innovation Project* is the latest in a series of reports released by SRDC presenting the results of CEIP. While previous reports have focused on how the project has affected participants, this report looks at the effects on communities. It indicates that communities can play an important part in improving local development and helping populations at risk of social exclusion.

In exchange for their entitlements to Employment Insurance or Income Assistance, CEIP offered individuals work on community projects for up to three years, giving them a significant period of stable income as well as an opportunity to gain work experience, acquire new skills, and expand their network of contacts. CEIP's design emphasized the central role of communities, which were responsible for identifying and prioritizing their local needs and developing projects that would employ CEIP workers to meet those needs.

Results suggest that, despite some initial early implementation challenges, communities can effectively engage, organize, and mobilize their resources to develop projects that both provide meaningful employment for participants and address a range of locally identified development needs. Each community that participated in CEIP organized a representative and functional board, which developed a strategic plan and made decisions about the community's use of CEIP resources. Communities then successfully mobilized over 250 local organizations to develop CEIP projects that would employ participants. Nearly 300 projects were created over the course of the study, which served a wide range of community needs, and provided over 1,300 employment opportunities for participants.

In addition to responding to two central needs of non-profit organizations — the availability of human resources and flexible, longer-term funding arrangements — CEIP also appears to have generated improvements in a number of other outcomes critical to community capacity. Residents were better able to preserve their social capital and experienced some improvements in social cohesion and inclusion in local community life. Findings also suggest that a number of positive changes have taken place for key groups that were of high priority for community boards, including youth, seniors, and those with low incomes.

[Read the full report.](#)

[Read the executive summary.](#)

[Learn more about CEIP.](#)

Developing francophone children's abilities: Child Care Pilot Project family workshops

Focusing on the development of young francophone children in minority communities, the Child Care Pilot Project (CCPP) encourages parents to pass on their French language and culture to children. Sponsored by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), the project is part of the Action Plan for Official Languages launched by the Government of Canada in 2003. Concretely, the project is aimed at testing a new preschool child care program that includes two components. The childcare component focuses exclusively on children in day care, while the family component provides workshops for families. During the day, educators deliver a program that uses play and creativity to teach French and foster the development of multiple literacies (e.g. the skills leading to reading, writing and numeracy). In the evening or on Saturday morning, family literacy workers provide workshops for parents and children. The workshops complement the daycare program through activities that give families information about their child's development and school readiness, community resources, and ways of passing on language and culture to a child. This document explains what topics are dealt with in family workshops, how they are organized, and what kind of information our analysis is expected to provide.

The family workshop program was designed for CCPP by Eduk. Its key concepts are based on family literacy programs such as *Grandir avec mon enfant*, *Chansons, contes et comptines*, *Grandir avec des livres* and *Learning Together*. Workshops are carried out in French; outside the workshops, English-speaking parents are accommodated to a certain extent.

Family workshop programming embodies some of the best practices recommended by a respected organization in the field, the Centre for Family Literacy. The workshops are intergenerational, directly addressing both parents and children. They use proven educational techniques (play approach for children, andragogic approach for adults) and are conducted by qualified staff with specific training in the program. Contents are adapted to the needs of minority Francophones, and the program includes an ongoing and manageable evaluation process that is used to improve the program. Unlike other programs, however, CCPP family workshops focus on the child's development rather than on improving parental literacy. Emphasis is on the development of significant adults in the child's life, so that these adults can in turn support their child's development.

Implemented as part of CCPP in November 2007, the family workshop program consisted of 10 two-hour workshops. Four workshops were given before the holidays and six after the holidays, beginning on 28 January 2008. Each workshop began with an introductory component. Parents then joined a staff person in a separate room for discussion and exchange. Sharing their experiences provided a way for parents to learn from each other. This approach is a way of building on families' strengths and emphasizing the value of what they are already doing for their children. The staff person was there as a resource person to encourage discussion, help state key points and help families access the information they need.

While parents were exchanging, activities were carried out with the children. The child component focuses on at least one type of multiple intelligence and one skill related to reading, writing or numeracy. The theory of "multiple intelligences" sees intelligence as a range of capacities, skills and mental abilities. This more complex view of intelligence goes beyond the limits imposed by the IQ. It

recognizes that human beings have multiple intelligences including logical-mathematical, linguistic, intrapersonal, spiritual, interpersonal, musical, spatial and kinaesthetic intelligences. Different types of intelligence, in constant interplay, develop as children interact with adults and with their world. Each child has every kind of intelligence, but to varying degrees. Through child component activities, children were given an opportunity to learn by using their strengths and develop each kind of intelligence.

Workshops ended with a joint parent/child component. This was the moment when parents could put into practice the tips or information discussed earlier in the workshop. All the activities in this component were designed in relation to multiple intelligences. Parents were invited to assess the workshop and were given information about the next one. They could also borrow educational kits. The kits, provided in fabric bags, included a variety of French-language resources for adults and children (CDs, DVDs and books). Access to resources in French is often a problem for families living in Francophone minority areas. The educational kits were designed to help with this problem.

A light meal was offered, either at the beginning or at the end of each workshop. This was an opportunity for families to share ideas and experiences with each other and with the staff person or educator. Although it was optional, a great majority of families chose to participate, saying that it was an opportunity to dialogue in French with other parents.

Workshops ended in early March 2008. Parent participation was relatively high in most communities, with attendance rates ranging from 38 to 88% (the average was 62%). Data was collected to analyze the implementation of the family workshops and examine their short-term effects on parents and children. Sources for the data include interviews of parents and children by staff, observation of workshops, surveys of parents before and after the workshops and assessments of children before and after the workshops. Findings will be discussed in an upcoming issue.

[Learn more about CCPP.](#)

[Visit the CCPP Web site.](#)

[Read the CCPP newsletter.](#)

Transition to work for people facing multiple barriers

Recovering drug users need strong supports to avoid relapse. The research from the City of Vancouver's Drug Policy Program (DPP) identifies employment as one protective factor against problematic drug use. Dialogues conducted by the DPP with former and current drug users also support this notion as they expressed a strong need for post-incarceration or post-treatment life-skills training and employment. Last year, the City of Vancouver's DPP initiated the Supported Employment Pilot Project, designed to provide individuals with a supported and gradual return to employment.

The City of Vancouver's Four Pillars Supported Employment Pilot Project was operational from April to December 2007, and created two full-time-equivalent positions within the City's Engineering Department of Sewers and Waterworks. Four individuals were recruited and shared the two positions; they worked and attended training sessions provided by the Hastings Institute on alternate weeks. Individuals were recruited from the Case Coordination Project (CCP), which is located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and managed by Building Opportunities for Business. To be eligible, individuals had to be in receipt of income assistance, in recovery from drug use, and ready and willing to return to work. SRDC was contracted to evaluate the project, which proved to be a moderate success.

Initially, four individuals were employed by the project to work for the City of Vancouver. Two of the participants were later employed on a temporary full-time basis for the duration of the project, while the other two left the project for health reasons. A key characteristic of the project was that participants would "job share," working on a biweekly basis. This model aimed to provide participants with time to develop the physical stamina required by the job, while giving the employer one full-time position. In practice, however, the employer encountered challenges, as participants had different capabilities and were not able to perform the same duties. Furthermore, the two participants that left were not replaced, leaving both departments with two half-time positions.

All those involved in the project identified the resources and support as an important factor in helping participants return to work. Employment and life-skills issues were addressed as they arose, and support was provided by a CCP case coordinator who had regular contact with participants. Support ranged from helping individuals meet the cost of work boots, providing bus tickets, resolving personal and social issues as well as working with individuals to develop routines that would assist them in their job. Employers were also able to approach the case coordinator for project-related issues.

Although participants were identified through CCP, it proved a challenging process to find individuals who were able to work an eight-hour day and were fit for duty. Most notably, some potential participants did not pass the medical, while others struggled to attend appointments and training sessions. In addition, employers and participants did not have the same level of expectation about the workers' abilities. To some extent, participants were given lighter duties and allowances were made for lateness or the need for additional supervision.

Some level of attrition had been expected: although the intention was to replace participants who left with additional people recruited by CCP and who had been attending training sessions. This

turned out to be impossible, however, due to the time and resources needed to train individuals, who were not always reliable. In addition, City of Vancouver staff was on strike for three months during which time participants did not work; this affected how the project operated and suggests that the evaluation findings should be treated with caution.

While the participants were all pleased by the prospect of working for the City of Vancouver, there was some discussion about the project's objective. Some participants saw it as general work experience, while others hoped that they might transition into work with the City of Vancouver. Overall, being identified as "ready to work" and being offered a real job with a good level of pay improved their confidence and self-esteem.

When the project came to a close at the end of 2007, it was seen as both worthwhile and necessary: participants were grateful that the project allowed them to return to work, and employers saw it as a social good as well as having a potential recruitment tool. The suitability of employment with the Sewers and Waterworks Departments, however, was raised as an issue partly because of the physically demanding nature of the work and because of health and safety issues involved. It was suggested that other City of Vancouver departments might be able to offer more suitable opportunities.

This project was an initiative of the City of Vancouver's Drug Policy Program. For more information, please contact Zarina Mulla, Drug Policy Planner, City of Vancouver.

[Read the SRDC working paper on the project.](#)

Does increased contact with participants improve the ability of surveys to gather evidence?

As part of its mission to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing social policies and programs, SRDC implements a range of strategies to tackle the methodological challenges that its studies encounter and thus improve the quality of evidence generated by those studies.

A working paper recently released by SRDC sheds new light on one such challenge, which is how best to keep in touch with project participants. The new paper presents one of the first rigorous tests of an approach that is commonly adopted to increase survey response when the same participants are expected to complete multiple surveys over time. Intriguingly, the findings suggest that more frequent contact between project researchers and project participants does not necessarily increase their response to surveys.

Testing survey contact methods is important to the work of SRDC and other policy researchers because some of the richest data for evidence-building are longitudinal data sets, especially when combined with an experiment. Yet, collecting data from the same participants over the long term poses many challenges. Participants are free to decline survey questions, opt out of whole surveys and even cease participating in the research, at any time. They can move home and become untraceable to the researchers. Each such loss can diminish the value of the resulting data for drawing valid conclusions.

The approach under test is the mailing of project information to participants in between data collection dates. Supported by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, SRDC's *Future to Discover* Pilot Project (FTD) took the opportunity to test whether mailing a postcard and a set of stickers six months prior to a planned survey increased the response rate to the survey. The participants were 1,967 high school students aged 17 years, on average, involved in a six-year experiment to determine the effects of policy interventions that might increase the students' chances of accessing post-secondary education. The researchers took advantage of the project's recruitment of two successive cohorts of Grade 9 students from the same schools in different years to test out an approach on the first cohort that, if found effective, could be implemented to increase response rates among the second.

The researchers took care to ensure that the mailing experiment produced practical results without interfering with the outcomes of the main study of post-secondary outcomes. They reviewed the literature on such contacts, engaged in a small focus group with equivalently-aged high school students to review the materials and messaging and consulted on the most appropriate content. The wording was vetted to ensure it would not constitute a form of "policy" treatment that might influence outcomes of interest to the main policy experiment. The eventual mailing comprised a postcard and stickers featuring stylized images and text related to the themes of the project and of maintaining contact. They were produced and mailed at low cost.

The mailing was tested using a random assignment experiment. Half of the intended survey sample in cohort one was sent the mailing and half was not. Assignment was stratified by the original project assignment to inventions so that no group offered any particular policy intervention was more or less likely to receive the mailing. This step was important to avoid any impact from the mailing experiment interfering with measurement of outcomes from the policy intervention experiment.

The results from the experiment were surprisingly conclusive: the mailing had no effect — positive or negative — on survey response rates. It also had no effect on the quality of the subsequent surveys. Interviewers' reports revealed no differences in the levels of respondents' expectations of the survey, no differences in their awareness of the project and no differences in respondents' willingness or reluctance to participate in the survey.

Conclusive results like these imply that the mailing was not an effective way to increase survey response and SRDC deduced that project resources would be better spent on alternative means to increase response.

As with all results, however, the same conclusion might not be drawn for other populations or studies. It is possible that under different circumstances a similar mailing could have an impact. Four sets of factors in particular may set this mailing experiment in context:

- The survey and the respondents' characteristics were very specific. The great majority of respondents were students in their last year attending one of 30 New Brunswick high schools. Such students might not have been very mobile. It is possible that once students move out of their parents' homes they will have reason to contact the researchers to provide new contact information, as instructed in the mailing. In other words, it can be hypothesized that the mailing has a longer-term impact, such as lowering future tracking costs, which is beyond the timeframe of the paper's analysis. Later analyses can test this hypothesis.
- Survey respondents were all offered an incentive of \$20 should they complete a FTD survey. This amount of money may have been a sufficient incentive to ensure good response rates with 17-year-old high school students. This hypothesis would be consistent with the literature on monetary incentives. In their review of the literature, Simmons and Wilmot conclude that even small amounts of money can have a more significant effect than non-monetary incentives on response rates. In other words, the mailing might have had an impact on response in the absence of such incentives.
- It is possible that sending the postcard six months before the survey was too far ahead of the intended survey contact to produce an impact.
- In the great majority of cases, the same interviewers undertook the 18-month contact call and the 30-month survey. The literature suggest that it is possible for a relationship to be established between interviewers and participants, which in this case may have been enough to ensure a good response rate, with or without an additional mailing.

Although the mailing had no effect on response rates, the experiment was a methodological success. At a relatively low cost, it was possible to test whether a mailing between survey waves was an efficient strategy for increasing response rates. The random assignment design of the experiment isolated any specific “mailing” impact, and found it to be effectively zero. Given the high response rate in the absence of the mailing, had all FTD participants been sent the postcard, it would have been impossible to determine whether or not the high response rates would have occurred in the absence of the mailing. In other words, this relatively simple experiment demonstrates the importance of having a valid counterfactual in any evaluation.

[Read the working paper.](#)

[Learn more about FTD.](#)

SRDC mourns the passing of Arthur Kroeger



Arthur Kroeger, a former SRDC Board Member died on May 9, 2008. Mr. Kroeger served as a Deputy Minister of a number of federal departments for nearly 20 years including the Ministry of Indian and Northern Development, of Transportation, of Regional Industrial Expansion and of Energy, Mines and Resources.

However, it was in his role as Deputy Minister of Employment and Immigration — now Human Resources and Social Development Canada — that he had the greatest influence on SRDC. Mr. Kroeger pushed for a randomized field trial to show the effects of a “make work pay” strategy on the ability of long-term welfare recipients to make the transition to full-time employment. The project — the **Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP)** — became SRDC’s and Canada’s most famous randomized field trial. It is studied around the world.

Mr. Kroeger also saw the need for an organization to provide objective, high-quality policy evidence to government. As a result, he was instrumental in the founding of SRDC and providing it with its first major research contract in the form of SSP.

After retiring from the civil service, Arthur Kroeger joined the SRDC Board of Directors in 1996 where his extensive experience with policy-making and labour markets were highly valued. Mr. Kroeger retired from the SRDC Board of Directors in 2004.

Mr. Kroeger will be sorely missed. We offer our most sincere condolences to his family.

(Photo courtesy of Mike Pinder/Carleton University. © Mike Pinder.)