

# Learning What Works

Evidence from SRDC's social experiments and research

## February 2009

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### Final evaluation report of the Case Coordination Project in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

SRDC released its final evaluation report of the Case Coordination Project (CCP) in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, an area with high rates of poverty, substance abuse, poor housing, and unemployment.

The project was designed to determine whether a comprehensive model delivering one-to-one support to long-term unemployed residents of the Downtown Eastside could help them return to employment and self-sufficiency. Components of the project and methods of delivery had to be flexible to meet the changing needs of participants.

The final report presents the findings of the CPP, with details on participants' employment, their outcomes from receiving Income Assistance, and their experiences with the project. The report also draws conclusions relating to project implementation and administration, as well as policy implications for similar projects.

For some participants, employment — especially mainstream and traditional employment — was not feasible. The evaluation found that there was a need for intensive one-on-one support for participants who were not able to take on mainstream employment or other initiatives. CCP provided support to participants, such as practical and life skills, financial help, and personal support so that many could improve their situation.

According to the evaluation data, many CCP participants, who were mostly men, lived in very difficult situations. Close to two-thirds were between 40 and 64 years of age and about one-third had lived in the Downtown Eastside for more than 10 years. Many lived in single-room occupancy hotels. Almost half of the participants were current substance users and approximately 80 per cent had been past users. Given the personal histories and circumstances of many participants, it was not surprising that they experienced multiple and complex barriers by those who referred them to the project as well as by the CCP case coordinators. Many barriers made it difficult for participants to move into employment without considerable supports.

The DTES Case Coordination Project was the result of collaboration between the Vancouver Agreement, the British Columbia Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (now the Ministry of Housing and Social Development) and Building Opportunities with Business. SRDC was contracted to conduct an independent evaluation of the project that was implemented between February 2005 and February 2008.

[Read the complete report.](#)

## The B.C. AVID Early Implementation Report: Addressing academic barriers to PSE

A recent report describes SRDC's rigorous field test of the high school program called AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) that aims to increase post-secondary enrolment among Grade 8 students with a B to C average. AVID offers four years of instruction in learning-to-learn strategies, tutorials, and motivational activities. The British Columbia AVID Pilot Project was established by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation to test in 18 Canadian schools the AVID program, which already exists in over 3,500 high schools in the United States.

SRDC has documented in the Foundation's pilot project, Future to Discover, how financial and information barriers might prevent students from accessing post-secondary education (PSE). AVID addresses academic barriers that may also be holding students back from achieving their potential. Such barriers include average grade performance, the completion of unsuitable courses, lack of engagement in learning, poor focus, and weak support to excel academically. The AVID curriculum includes familiarizing students with advanced academic study (learning how to write essays, take notes, and prepare for tests). It offers them regular tutorials with senior high school and post-secondary student tutors and motivates them to visit post-secondary campuses and hear guest speakers. The goal is to enhance students' academic proficiency and readiness to access their choice of post-secondary education program.

Overall, nearly 9 in 10 AVID program group students received 81 or more hours of AVID elective class activities during their first year, but these activities were not apportioned as expected. Students spent less time in tutorial classes and more time in curriculum classes than predicted by the AVID model. Several sites experienced difficulties recruiting and maintaining suitable tutors. There was more success with providing the motivational components of the AVID program, including team-building activities, special presentations, and field trips.

The report draws on evidence SRDC collected from the pilot project's inception up until completion of the first full year of program delivery in Grade 9. There were 901 participants in the project's program group, 166 on a program wait list, and 455 randomly assigned to a comparison group. Given that AVID should be offered only to a select group of middle-achieving students, it was important that both recruitment and selection of participants for the project followed the required procedures.

Grade 9 teachers received what they perceived as very helpful training, resource guides, and curriculum from AVID program developers. However, delivering the program simultaneously in 18 schools has proven difficult for several reasons, including problems with scheduling activities and organizing tutorial classes.

Despite these challenges, BC educators have established a framework for evaluating AVID's impacts on post-secondary enrolment. SRDC will continue to collect data on the delivery of the program through to June 2010 and looks forward to analyzing the program's impacts on participants' secondary school achievement and post-secondary enrolment.

[Read the executive summary.](#)

[Read the complete report.](#)

## CEIP: A viable alternative for vulnerable communities and the unemployed

SRDC published the final results of the Community Employment Innovation Project (CEIP) in its latest report, *Encouraging Work and Supporting Communities*. The project was conceived to test an active re-employment strategy for unemployed individuals who volunteer to work on local community projects in areas affected by chronic unemployment. It offered recipients of employment insurance and social assistance the opportunity to forego their income support benefits in exchange for three years of continuous employment on projects that were developed by organizations in selected communities.

The main objectives were to determine whether this form of support would allow the unemployed to protect and, perhaps, increase their skills and expand their social networks, thereby increasing their level of attachment to the labour market in a sustainable way. At the same time, CEIP tested whether the third sector could be used to develop opportunities for work that were meaningful for both the participants and the communities. Indeed, communities were responsible for creating decision-making bodies and mobilizing sponsors to develop projects that would employ CEIP workers in order to fulfill their local needs. The hope was that through the process and products of their efforts, there would be improvements in capacity, cohesion, and the local economic and social conditions.

Results showed that the CEIP model was successful in promoting local cohesion, encouraging the development of social capital and increasing socially inclusive activities in participating communities. Large positive community effects were achieved for groups served by the projects, in particular for youth, seniors and low income families. Another interesting finding was that individuals participating in community-sponsored projects tended to engage more in formal volunteering both during and after the project ended. This was important for both individuals and communities, as it provided much-needed resources for local organizations and for the volunteers it served as another link to employment, and the community promoted greater levels of social inclusion.

During the project, participants also realized large improvements in their employment and earnings, increased their household income, reduced their level of poverty and improved their well-being. While the effects on employment rates were not sustained after the project ended, the experience that participants received through CEIP helped many move into better quality jobs after the program. Many also maintained the improvements in their social networks as well as their transferable skills and attitudes toward work after leaving the project. One particularly striking positive finding was that participants who were previously on welfare experienced sustained reductions in their receipt of income assistance long after the project was over.

All and all, when benefits to unemployed individuals and communities are taken into consideration, the CEIP model can represent a viable alternative to conventional transfer programs in areas where jobs are scarce. In fact, according to results, an employment program based on CEIP would be a cost-effective approach, generating nearly \$1.40 in net benefits for individuals and communities for every dollar spent by government.

To date, SRDC has presented the CEIP results across the country, notably at the 2008 conference of the Canadian Economics Association in British Columbia, the Fourth Annual Symposium of the Population, Work and Family Policy Research Collaboration in Quebec, and the annual conference

of the Atlantic Canada Economics Association in Nova Scotia. SRDC will make other presentations at the 2009 Statistics Canada Socio-economic Conference (Quebec) and the inaugural conference of the Canadian Social Forum (Alberta) in May, followed by the annual conference of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (Manitoba) in June.

CEIP took place in six communities of the regional municipality of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia. SRDC conducted the project from 1999 to 2005, which involved over 1,500 participants and 250 not-for-profit organizations and their staff. The project was funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services.

[Read the executive summary.](#)

[Read the complete report.](#)

## Data from the Community Employment Innovation Project is available to interested researchers

SRDC is seeking proposals for research papers or expressions of interest in using the data sets from the Community Employment Innovation Project (CEIP). CEIP is an internationally recognized randomized experiment that tested the value of community-based employment as an alternative to traditional income transfers with the aim of preserving participants' employability, while supporting local community development (see article, "CEIP: A viable alternative for vulnerable communities and the unemployed").

CEIP took place in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality of Nova Scotia from 1999 to 2008 and involved over 1,500 participants and 250 not-for-profit organizations. The final project report released in November 2008 presented promising results for participants and communities on a wide range of economic and social outcomes.

The nine-year project produced several large longitudinal, data sets including four and half years of survey data from recipients of employment insurance (EI) and income assistance, measuring their employment, earnings, and income, as well as social networks, transferable skills, and health and well-being. This survey data was supplemented by six years of administrative data on receipts of EI and income assistance. Similarly, the project produced a large three-wave longitudinal survey data set with a random sample of residents in six participating program communities and seven comparison communities in Cape Breton. This data set covers a range of economic and social measures related to the health of communities, including employment, income, education, indicators of inclusion, local participation and time use, cohesion and trust, availability of social supports, and health and well-being.

SRDC is seeking expressions of interest to work with these data sets. Please note that there is no funding available to support researchers or graduate students to conduct work with CEIP data at this time. For a description of available data sets or more information on the subject, please contact David Gyarmati, Director of Research, at (613) 237-5298 or [dgyarmati@srdc.org](mailto:dgyarmati@srdc.org).

## The Child Care Pilot Project is extended

SRDC's Child Care Pilot Project (CCPP) is testing a preschool daycare service designed to help children master the French language, develop a sense of belonging to Francophone culture, and become ready for school. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), which funds the project, recently decided to extend it for two more years. Children will now be followed for four years, until they reach the age of seven and are enrolled in second grade. A second cohort has been added to the project, ensuring a sufficient number of participants to provide reliable conclusions. In all, 405 families are participating in the project, 304 from the first cohort recruited in 2007 and 101 from the second cohort recruited in 2008. For the second cohort, implementation of the preschool program and assessment of its effect will be carried out in the same way as for the first so that the two cohorts can be combined for impact analyses. Extending the program will make it possible to analyse its effects on the readiness of children from minority Francophone communities for French-language schooling and on their retention by this school system.

What is a reliable way of assessing the effects of a new daycare program on the development of children in minority Francophone environments?

The Child Care Pilot Project uses an instrument developed by KSI Research International Inc., a research organization based at the University of New Brunswick. The Early Years Evaluation – Direct Assessment (EYE-DA) has an enviable reputation thanks to its psychometric properties. This tool, which has been adopted by the New Brunswick Department of Education, measures five aspects of children's development: awareness of and involvement in Francophone culture; language and communication; awareness of self and the environment; cognitive skills; and physical development. One of the instrument's advantages is that it can be used to trace a child's development trajectory. Also, the evaluation can be carried out either in French or in English, making it possible to identify the child's first language.

However, use of EYE-DA does present some difficulties in the CCPP context. It is generally acknowledged that results of tests measuring the development of children in preschool situations are not always valid. Measurement errors may be amplified for a variety of reasons: young children are shy and refuse to speak; tests are carried out in an inadequate environment; the evaluator finds it difficult to get a child's attention; tests may include questions that prevent children from revealing what they really know. Therefore, test results may be biased by children's lack of response, and this bias may affect the findings of a given study.

Children participating in the pilot project in the fall of 2007 were in the lower range of the age bracket for taking EYE-DA tests (from 2 years 8 months to 6 years). In addition, they often came from bilingual families, which sometimes made it difficult to know in what language the children were most at ease. To help solve this difficulty, SRDC defined a series of guidelines to ensure more accurate results and to verify children's understanding of certain concepts. For instance, the concept of "spoken language" is often difficult to understand for bilingual children who confuse French and English. For this reason, the same test questions are put to children and parents in order to see if responses are valid. Compliance with these guidelines will be crucial for the analyses that will be carried out in the spring of 2009.

## SRDC to evaluate initiatives of the BC Healthy Living Alliance

The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) has awarded SRDC with the second phase of the contract to evaluate initiatives of the BC Healthy Living Alliance (BCHLA).

BCHLA is a provincial coalition of organizations working together to improve the health of British Columbians. BCHLA received funding from the provincial government's ActNow BC program to implement 15 initiatives designed to deliver activities across the province under three themes — Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, and Tobacco Reduction. MSFHR has entered into an agreement with BCHLA to facilitate an independent evaluation of BCHLA initiatives. The evaluation is guided by a nine-member External Expert Advisory Panel established by the MSFHR.

In Phase 2, SRDC will conduct three main activities.

1. An outcome evaluation of five BCHLA initiatives:
  - School-based Sugar Sweetened Beverage Education Initiative (*SipSmart!BC*) — *SipSmart!BC* is designed to deliver several lessons to students in grades 4, 5, and 6 that will inform them about the health risks associated with sugary drinks, and to affect their behavior regarding consumption of sugar sweetened beverages.
  - Healthy Food and Beverage Sales in Recreation Facilities — This initiative aims to make healthy food choices available in places where people work and play and to decrease access to unhealthy food choices in those same places by changing the food environment in these settings.
  - Farm to School Salad Bar — The aim of this initiative is to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables among school aged children by increasing access to local, fresh, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods.
  - Tobacco-Free Workplace Initiative — This initiative is designed to support employers to implement tobacco-free workplaces and cessation resources adapted for their workplaces and employees.
  - Provincial Walking Initiative (Walk BC) — WalkBC is designed to increase physical activity for “inactive” adults by encouraging them to participate in individual or group walking in community, workplace, and health care settings.
2. A formative evaluation of the BCHLA Smoke-Free Housing in Multiple-Unit Dwellings Initiative, which aims to support interested housing providers to increase the number of voluntary smoke-free units available in multi-unit dwellings.
3. A case study of the Community Capacity Building Strategy that engages people to make their community a healthier and more vibrant place.

The evaluation will build on the plans developed in Phase 1. The final reports are expected to be completed in spring 2010.

Details about BCHLA initiatives are available at [www.bchealthyliving.ca](http://www.bchealthyliving.ca). For information about the evaluation, contact Susanna Gurr or Barbara Dobson at SRDC.



## Scott Murray joins SRDC as Senior Fellow

For over two decades, Scott Murray has specialized in the design and conduct of large-scale surveys to meet emerging public policy issues. His work has included studies of volunteer activities, child care usage, longitudinal labour market activity, and international comparative work in the assessment of adult skill and participation in adult education and training. Mr. Murray is President of DataAngel Policy Research Inc., a full service policy research company serving a broad range of national and international clients. He is also International Study Director for the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL). In 2005, Mr. Murray became Director, Education Outcomes at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) where he was responsible for programs of adult and student skill assessment. In 1999, he took up the post of Director General, Social and Institutional Statistics, at Statistics Canada. Prior to this appointment, he had spent over 20 years in the Special Surveys Division at Statistics Canada, including a period of 5 years as Director. Mr. Murray holds an Honours BA in Business Administration from the University of Western Ontario.

SRDC senior fellows are leading practitioners or scholars who collaborate occasionally on SRDC projects as special advisers or project team members.

## SRDC welcomes new staff

### **Ross Baylin**, Financial Advisor

Mr. Baylin joins SRDC to perform comptroller duties on a temporary basis and provide advice on financial matters. He comes to us from the Policy Research Initiative at the Privy Council Office where he has been Director of Finance and Operations since 2001.

### **Annie Bérubé**, Senior Research Associate, Child Care Pilot Project

Ms. Bérubé holds a Ph.D. in community psychology from the Université du Québec à Montréal. She has an extensive research background in the area of child development and program evaluation, with a focus on the collaboration between parents and school (family-school link) and behavioural difficulties in school settings.

### **Jenn Dixon**, Researcher, Evaluation of BC Healthy Living Alliance initiatives

Ms. Dixon holds a Master's Degree in Population and Public Health from Simon Fraser University. She has policy, program, and research experience in public health and health promotion.

### **Christopher Mallory**, Publications Production Manager

Mr. Mallory brings with him over 15 years of experience managing the publication process in the federal government. He comes to us from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada where, as Report Production Manager, he produced a variety of publications in several languages (including English, French, and Inuktitut). In addition to working with SRDC project managers to meet their publication needs, he is responsible for developing corporate communications products, including Web sites, electronic newsletters, and promotional material, and coordinating SRDC's conference participation.

### **Karen Myers**, Senior Research Associate

Ms. Myers brings over 10 years of experience in conducting policy relevant research in the areas of social policy, adult education, and labour markets. Prior to joining SRDC, she was a senior policy advisor with the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. In addition to her research and policy skills, she has several years of applied experience as an adult learning consultant in both the private and community sectors. She has a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Queen's University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto. Her first project with SRDC involves developing a design for the demonstration and evaluation of a new approach to helping low-skilled workers invest in human capital and research their economic potential.

**Jennifer Robson**, Senior Research Associate

Ms. Robson comes to SRDC with experience as Senior Policy Research Officer of the Policy Research Initiative at the Privy Council Office and Director of Policy Research and Development for Social and Enterprise Development Innovations. She has a Master's Degree in Political Science from Carleton University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Public Policy and Administration at the same university.

**Matthieu Verstraete**, Research Associate, Child Care Pilot Project

Mr. Verstraete joins SRDC with a background in microeconomics and a Master's Degree in Economics from the Université du Québec à Montréal. His past work has included analyses of child care issues using the data from Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. At SRDC, he will analyze data gathered for the Child Care Pilot Project over the next few years.