

**CAPACITY for Growth:
Final Evaluation Report**

September, 2000

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In collaboration with the CAPACITY for Growth Evaluation Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'CAPACITY for Growth' comprises two projects developed to combat poverty by providing personal and employment counselling in decentralized sites throughout the City of Cambridge. Both projects resulted from partnerships formed among multipurpose neighbourhood agencies and local agencies with expertise in personal and employment counselling.

CAPACITY for Growth sought to build on the potential of the neighbourhood organizations and the Self-Help Food Bank to serve as meeting places for people in need of assistance and centralized agencies with services to offer. Through the efforts of outreach workers associated with the decentralized sites¹ and the partnerships established between the decentralized sites and the centralized service agencies², CAPACITY for Growth intended to build more effective ties among individuals at the grassroots and the larger community in which they lived.

The main goals³ of the decentralized service delivery models included:

- a) "To reduce poverty by increasing accessibility to employment and supportive services within neighbourhood groups and the Cambridge Self Help Food Bank."
- b) For the Langs Farm Village Association Resource Centre staff and volunteers "to assist participants from the Langs Farm neighbourhood to accumulate the critical mass of strengths in the areas we define as determinants of health that will enable them to become self sufficient".

The main goals of this evaluation research included both process and outcome components. In fact, a process evaluation was completed in March 2000. This current final evaluation report provides data relating to the impacts of the decentralised employment and personal counselling on program participants, the organisations involved and the wider community. The focus of this report is on the overall activities and impacts of this new initiative on the six sites as a whole; detailed analyses of the activities and impacts at each of the six individual sites were not completed. The focus also includes an assessment of differences and similarities between decentralised and centralised sites.

An extensive literature review was conducted in support of the CAPACITY for Growth evaluation process. Topics examined included the following: conceptions of poverty as self-sufficiency; barriers to employment; holistic approaches to poverty reduction; neighbourhood organizations as multi-service centres; welfare to work programs (including the role of personal and employment counselling); outreach; service integration; asset-based community development; social capital; comprehensive community building initiatives, and; partnership building.

Personal interviews were conducted with staff and volunteers involved in this initiative. The highlights are varied. Centralised service agencies and neighbourhood organizations worked well together (e.g., consensus decision-making). All project partners supported the concept of "holistic" service delivery. The outreach campaign raised the profile of the neighbourhood organizations; across the board increases in their programs and services were realized.

¹ The decentralised sites included: Preston Heights Community Group, Southwood Community Centre, Christopher-Champlain Community Centre, Greenway-Chaplin Community Centre, Langs Farm Village Association and the Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank.

² Centralised sites included: Lutherwood CODA, Cambridge Youth Services and Family Services of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

³ These goals were extracted verbatim from the proposals that were submitted to the funders.

Counselling agencies experienced a substantial demand for their services at the decentralized sites. In general, project staff perceived that clients seen at the decentralized sites more consistently faced multiple barriers to employment than did clients at the centralized sites.

A demographic analysis of program participants at decentralised and centralised sites was undertaken. The following results were evident: a significantly higher proportion of people using the services at decentralized sites are women; a majority of the people using the services at decentralized sites are single parents or unattached individuals; a notably low number of people (less than 2 percent) using the services at decentralized sites are seeking service in a language other than English, and; data from adults for both centralised and decentralised sites showed that the largest number of program participants relied on Ontario Works as their main source of income.

A telephone follow-up survey was conducted with 60 program participants from decentralised sites in May 2000. Highlights of what a majority of both youth and adult respondents said include the following: they were satisfied with the employment services they received; they stated a preference for the decentralized sites; they thought they had an increase in their ability to find employment or education since becoming involved with an employment counsellor; they said they feel more hopeful about the future since connecting with their employment counsellor; they said their level of understanding of employment-related services has increased since working with their employment counsellor, and; they said their income has stayed the same since connecting with an employment counsellor. Two main reasons respondents gave for preferring to receive services at the decentralized sites were ease of accessing services close to home and comfort with the decentralized sites' informal, familiar and friendly setting.

An attempt to measure the barriers to employment that decentralised and centralised site program participants experience was made. In general, it appears that adults at the decentralised sites do have more barriers to employment than individuals at the centralised sites. This was not as evident for youth.

The overall CAPACITY for Growth initiative met or surpassed most of its key targets:⁴

- The outreach campaign aimed to reach 12,500 families; as of May 2000, 19,715 people had received information about the project.
- The project set out to conduct action planning with 400 adults and youth. As of May 2000, 346 adults and youth had received counselling assistance.
- The project aimed to help 144 neighbourhood residents exit poverty, secure employment and/or enter a program of training or education; as of May 2000, 122 neighbourhood residents had secured employment or entered a program of training or education.⁵

Action planning outcomes at the decentralized sites were comparable to the outcomes achieved at centralized sites.

Although we learned much during this evaluation process, these results are limited given the time and resources that were made available. Questions about impacts remain – especially questions of a longitudinal nature that would offer a more definitive answer about supporting people to move out of poverty and into healthier states of being.

⁴ It is noteworthy that some data from some sites showed targets were not met. The data provided here are for the six decentralised sites combined.

⁵ Research conducted for the project was unable to determine how many people exited poverty due to the CAPACITY for Growth initiative specifically. Income data obtained through entry and exit surveys were too weak to draw conclusions.

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