



## NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

### KIDS 1<sup>ST</sup> PROJECT

The Kids 1<sup>st</sup> Project was a crime prevention program for children 9 to 11 years old. Delivered by the John Howard Society of Windsor-Essex County from 2000 to 2004, the project was designed for young people who were living in the west end of Windsor Ontario and who were at risk of, or already involved in, criminal behaviours.

The objective of the project was to help at-risk children avoid future delinquent behaviour by promoting the acquisition and maintenance of pro-social skills. With an individualized approach, this project aimed to reduce risks and to increase protective factors among youths, families and collectivities.



Over a period of one year, Kids 1<sup>st</sup> offered children a variety of services and activities, such as group activities, individual counseling, family contact and partnerships with the school. It was delivered by child care professionals and educators on a voluntary basis.

#### Project assessment

Kids 1<sup>st</sup> offered children the opportunity to engage in the *Attendance Centre Phase* for 12 weeks, 3 evenings per week. The goal of these evening sessions was to develop new skills to reduce the problem behaviours. Youths were involved in structured activities, which centered on developing thinking skills, behavioral management programming and various pro-social recreational and social events.

Access to appropriate support services was facilitated by the project's *Community Placement Phase*. This was available to participants for an additional 36 weeks and included 12 booster sessions where children and their families received structured maintenance programming within a group setting.

The evaluation examined processes and outcomes of the project. Using both standardized and self-report instruments, the evaluation examined attitudes and behaviours of 60 participants before and after the intervention.

In addition to a comprehensive risk inventory, assessment measures were also administered to parents, teachers and project staff at the beginning of the attendance phase, following the completion of this phase and 12 months after their initial admission to the project. Police contacts before and after project participation were also recorded.

#### Key findings

The process evaluation demonstrated that:

- Pre-delinquent youth in need of prevention services were successfully targeted by the Kids 1<sup>st</sup> Project.
- 91% of the children involved in the project were classified as high-risk, meaning they had multiple risk factors.
- The drop-out-rate was low and overall attendance was high indicating that participants made strong attachments to the project and were willing to participate on a regular basis.
- A low referral rate created a challenge, as the majority of referrals came not as expected from the police but from the schools.



- Linking participants with community resources was problematic. Many participants and their families did not follow through on referrals. Some parents seemed to want to stay with the services provided during the attendance phase (individual setting) making it difficult to move them to the next phase (group setting).

The outcome evaluation indicated that:

- Pro-social skills improved as indicated by positive attitudinal skills and behavioural changes. Some of these gains were lost when a subsequent evaluation took place of the project twelve weeks later.
- Participants experienced significant reduction with problems in the areas of mental health, social and cognitive skills, consequential thinking, social perspective taking, problem solving and interpersonal skills.
- There were also statistically significant changes regarding aggressive behaviour and 'other' problems by the participants.
- Twenty-one months after participation in the project, only 13.3% of participants had contacts with the police.

## Lessons learned

The Kids 1<sup>st</sup> Project generated a number of important lessons:

- The use of two staff members, supported by volunteers, helped ensure that individual behavioural problems did not overpower the group process.
- Some school principals were hesitant to make multiple referrals to the project fearing the potential of developing undesirable school-based peer groups.
- Providing transportation to and from the attendance center was a key factor in maintaining attendance rates.
- Many youth and parents developed a close relationship to the project staff, to the point of creating barriers for families in seeking alternative community resources during the community placement phase. Steps need to be developed to facilitate the movement of families between the different phases.

## Conclusion

Evaluation results indicate that the Kids 1<sup>st</sup> Project had a positive impact on participants. This form of structured intervention has been successful in addressing specific needs of youth and families at risk.

*Kids 1<sup>st</sup> Project* provides a sound basis for future programming and holds good promise to reduce delinquency by affecting risk factors among high risk children and youth.

*For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre at 1-877-302-6272 or visit our website at: [www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc)*

*You can also visit the website of the Kids 1<sup>st</sup> Project at: <http://www.jhswindsor.org/kidintro.html>*