

Notes for OTF Grant Ref # LP100013

360 Project

The Phoenix Centre for Children and Families/Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network (CPAN)

Notes regarding the project, experience, and deep learning.

Over the course of the project it has been hard to recruit and keep participants. Despite using every tool we know including presentations to many agencies, posters, fliers, TV and radio PSA's we were not overwhelmed with applicants. What did help the first year was the ability to have support from social services, including slips put in envelopes being sent out, newsletters, and advertising on the TV screens in the waiting rooms as well as fliers left where assistance recipients would notice them. Unfortunately in year 2 we were told that we were unable to use this great resource.

One thing that became very evident early on was that many of our participants had special/high needs children. Some were already diagnosed, some were not, and all were extremely busy needing a lot of supervision. The other thing evident was that the parents were overwhelmed, struggling, and were in need of support (in many ways) and hope.

Although first in-person meetings were 'awkward' with many participants not making eye contact and being quiet. As meetings progressed connections were made and participants would car pool, share resources and also connecting outside of the meetings. There were times when participants would offer items such as household items, clothing, and other things that were needed by other participants, or simply offer the items they no longer needed to others in the group. They became like a family. The children also came together with older ones helping the younger children.

The participants were becoming used to meeting and looked forward to the meetings. They would cook together and share information on new resources they had found, or talk about a problem or need that had arisen. The group also started discussing food security, housing, and other important issues. They became excited and wanted to see a reduction in food waste. One of the participants in Arnprior had been educated and worked previously cooking for hotels, she offered to cook and often shared ideas with the group. In the Pembroke group the participants shared ideas for what to cook and some took turns in cooking, while others learned a new dish!

All participants benefitted from the 360 Project. We had low numbers, however the group that continued want to continue to meet after the project ends. We (CPAN) will support this and encourage the growth of work that could follow, such as community kitchens and gardens, workshops, informal meetings for all parents in need of support.

Many participants were able to improve their situations.

- Started a business
- Got hired on permanently
- Got a job by using employment services financial support
- Used Economic development to learn how to start/run a business
- Connected with their indigenous roots and have started crafting, teaching, presenting, and has learned drumming as well as Jingle dancing.
- Started an informal Taco business in the downtown core

Program/models that don't help as they should

Another important issue was housing. Some participants already lived in housing, others were struggling to make ends meet paying market value rent. It soon became evident that some programs are not congruent with helping low income families to get ahead. This is just one example:

One particular participant in desperate need of housing has been on the housing list for years. He currently lives in a small 2 bedroom apartment with 2 special needs children, one also has a physical health issue which will deteriorate with time. His children are getting older and in need of their own bedroom so he decided to get rid of his freezer and build a murphy bed. He had been asking where he was on the list and could only get a vague answer "3-5 years" I offered to work with him to find out where exactly he was on the list, and he gratefully agreed. A few emails later he found out he was now 3rd on the list and should be housed within 3-6 months! The strange thing was that each time he enquired about his housing status he would receive another letter offering COHB (example uploaded), which would be a great idea except that there is a huge drawback. Once an applicant is approved to get COHB benefit then they are taken off the housing list. All participants discussed this at length and thought that **a better way of helping would be to allow applicant to receive the COHB benefit until they were in geared to income housing.**

Another issue that was brought to our attention is **the inability to get legal representation in criminal matters if the person being charged did not face incarceration.** As many low income people don't have the skill, confidence, or adequate education, this seems cruel and unfair.

With most participants having one or more special needs children many spoke about the struggles to get help in a timely manner. Psycho-educational and psycho-diagnostic assessments are costly and not available to many. Families on assistance can only ask for and receive \$500 which can only be given if the family can come up with the remaining \$2,000 or more. Schools have limited assessments available so students must go on a growing list. This is especially difficult when the child switches schools or has to transition to another school. One client was told that by the time her child reached anywhere near the top of the list they would be in another school and would have to go on their list. A hopeless and daunting thought for the parent who already could see her child falling behind and unable to get the help needed. CPAN was able to contact a couple of funding sources to help this child get the help needed. **The participants in both groups would like to see assessments made available at the earliest opportunities, as many saw their child/children suffer while waiting to be assessed. And that every child that needs one should be able to get one, no matter what their socioeconomic background is.** Many spoke about how many times they had to go to the school regarding their children, at times students would be bullied, sent home, suspended, and/or expelled. They would also be labelled as troublemakers.

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected low income, single parent families.

Once the pandemic hit we were no longer able to hold in-person gatherings, so turned to virtual meetings over Zoom. This was a struggle for many as they couldn't get out for a break, and as their children weren't getting on the bus for school they didn't get a break to catch up on chores, etc..

Food

Many struggled trying to feed the children who were always in need of a snack or drink, this tied with the facts that their limited income was being stretched by the fact that grocery store shelves were being emptied, and they could only shop when their assistance came in. By then they would have to take what is there, even if it meant it was more expensive. They didn't have the luxury of having food in the pantry.

Online learning

Parents also struggled to become 'teachers' some did not graduate themselves. There were also problems with online learning as participants had to buy more bandwidth. One client called a teacher to ask for help and was told "good luck, do your best" the parent felt very let down.

Clothing

I was contacted by one participant that needed help as her son had a growth-spurt and nothing that fit him anymore (including underwear and shoes). The parent mentioned that she normally picked up clothing from the thrift store, but now they are closed. CPAN was able to contact a couple of people locally that helped with clothing, shoes, and new underwear.

Income

Participants were nervous about applying for CERB, some had earned a small amount in honorariums. **Some may have been eligible but were too frightened to apply.** We also had participants who weren't on assistance (but should have been). One was left with no identification after an abusing ex destroyed it all, the other was struggling without. CPAN was able to help build relationships with both, connect the one with no id to resources and ultimately get both on assistance.

Resource Manuals

The 360 project also made presentations to many groups, agencies, etc. and shared our resource manuals (which are living documents). I will download the 3 booklets.

Recommendations from participants

- Programs and services offered should work with existing and/or other programs and services to improve lives of low income, and give families a hand up.
- In-person meetings with food, social gatherings, and some learning should continue
- Participants should be rewarded for attending – take home food, gift card, etc.
- The meeting should include all parents who need the support, some 2 parent households are living as single parents.
- There should be a navigator available in all communities

Partnerships on the 360 grant

There doesn't seem to be the possibility of changing the original partnership names on the report.

- JJ's Tap and Grill – now closed and cannot indicate this on partnership list
- Employment Networks Renfrew – closed and changed to ontrac (which is also in Arnprior)
- 'Jack and Faiths' No Frills - changed ownership- and is now called 'Marks' No Frills – the new owner is still very much involved in helping the community.