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MCFD — RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Evaluation Report

Kinnections Youth Mentoring Program

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the Kinnections Youth Mentoring Program that was initiated in September 2009 by the Research, Analysis and Evaluation Team, in the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), at the request of the Executive Director, Deputy Minister's office.

About the program

Kinnections Youth Mentoring is a pilot program that was developed and implemented in 2007 by MCFD in partnership with three contracted service providers in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia: Pacific Community Resources Society (PCRS), PLEA Community Services Society (PLEA), and Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA).

The program matches adult volunteers with youth, 15–19 years of age, who are on a Youth Agreement or in the continuing care or custody of the ministry or a delegated Aboriginal agency. The program is intended to strengthen the youth's resilience by connecting them with supportive adult mentors, who can also become their advocates, role models and friends, during the time they are in care and into adulthood.

Program activities include:

- Recruiting volunteer mentors and networking within the community
- Recruiting youth participants and liaising with community partners
- Screening, orientation and engagement of mentors and youth
- Training mentors, and
- Matching and supporting mentors and youth.

Implementation of the three Kinnections pilot sites took place over a five-month period. The PLEA pilot site was the first to start up, in August 2007, serving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth in Maple Ridge and Ridge Meadows. The PCRS pilot site opened in September 2007, serving non-Aboriginal youth in Surrey, Langley, White Rock and Delta. The UNYA site opened in November 2007, serving Aboriginal youth in Vancouver. The Kinnections program was formally launched by the Minister of Children and Family Development in March 2008.

Survey highlights

- Most of the youth (82%) had expectations when they first joined Kinnections, and all of those youth indicated that their expectations had been met.
- All of the youth (100%) said they were satisfied with the relationship with their mentor, and the vast majority of youth (88%) and mentors (87%) thought they would remain connected with each other for a long time.
- A large majority of youth (82%) and mentors (81%) agreed that, as a result of the mentoring relationship, the youth felt they had more options for the future.
- Many youth (59%) also said they had higher expectations of themselves.
- Almost all of the caregivers (91%) thought the youth enjoyed being in Kinnections, and many (73%) felt that, as a result of the mentoring relationship, the youth were getting along better with their family and friends.

Previous evaluation

In April 2008, after Kinnections had been formally launched, the ministry contracted with a team of external consultants to undertake a formative and summative evaluation of the program.¹

Data collection for this initial evaluation took place from November 2008 to February 2009, and included interviews with volunteer mentors, youth participants, community partners and MCFD staff. In addition, output data was collected from the pilot sites and during joint agency meetings, and a review of the mentoring literature and ministry documents related to the program, including a concept paper that set out its theoretical underpinnings, was conducted.

The consultants found that Kinnections was unique in that it was designed specifically for youth who were preparing to transition out of government care. They noted that other mentorship programs in the province were not as accessible to, or inclusive of, youth in care. They also noted that Kinnections provided a strong cultural component for Aboriginal youth in care, through one of its sites.

The consultants also found that progress had been made toward achieving many short term or formative outcomes, even though the three pilot sites were encountering significant challenges recruiting youth participants and mentors. In particular, referral sources were reluctant to refer youth to a “pilot” program, and there was a belief that some youth in care would be reluctant to engage in yet another relationship that might not last. Thus, efforts to recruit youth participants were hampered by the

perception that neither the program nor the mentoring relationships would last. Despite these challenges, Kinnections workers in the pilot sites were seen as doing a very good job of promoting the program, recruiting youth participants and volunteer mentors, and supporting those who had been matched.

Summative findings (or outcomes attributable to the program) were more difficult to establish because of the newness of the program and pilot sites. Nonetheless, the consultants found evidence to suggest that progress was being made in creating respectful and trusting relationships between the youth and mentors who were matched, and youth in the program were generally reporting that their mentor was someone who listened to them and to whom they could voice issues of importance to them.

Recommendations included:

- continuing the program for another one to two years
- broadening the sources of referrals and eligibility criteria
- developing program guidelines
- tracking cost effectiveness
- making the program part of an overall ministry framework or strategy to support youth aging out of care, and
- integrating the program with pre-existing youth transition services.

A number of these recommendations were implemented in 2009. In particular, continuation of the pilot program was approved for another year, the sources of referrals were expanded, and eligibility was extended to young people on Youth Agreements and to other youth on a case-by-case basis.

About this evaluation

This second evaluation was initiated in September 2009. Data collection and analysis were completed in March 2010.

Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide an analysis of the costs of piloting the Kinnections program in relation to the benefits of the program for the youth involved.

Design

The evaluation was designed to get an understanding of the program’s budget, expenditures and output (measured by the number of active months youth were in a mentoring relationship) and how youth experienced and were affected by the mentoring relationship.

In addition, the evaluators sought to collect the views of mentors, caregivers and social workers involved with youth in Kinnections, about the program, the nature of the mentoring relationship, and changes they had observed in the youth that could be attributed to the mentoring relationship.

The evaluation was also designed to get an understanding of how satisfied the mentors were with the level of information, interaction and support they received and experienced as volunteers in the Kinnections program, and how they thought the program could be improved.

Data collection methods

A survey was conducted with 17 youth who had been matched with a volunteer mentor. Recruitment of youth participants was undertaken by the Kinnections coordinators in the three pilot sites.

Each coordinator was asked to identify 8 youth who had been matched with a mentor and were willing to participate in a telephone survey. One site was able to identify 8 youth, a second site identified 5 youth, and a third site identified 4 youth, for a total of 17 youth participants.

Fifteen of the 17 youth had been matched with their mentor before the data collection cut-off date of October 31, 2009. The other two had been matched with a mentor between October 31 and December 31, 2009. Data related to these two respondents are not included in the demographic analysis presented in the next section of this report.

All of the youth participants consented to have the evaluators contact their mentors, caregivers and social workers, to invite them to participate in similar surveys. Sixteen mentors and 11 caregivers were subsequently surveyed. Surveys with social workers were not completed in time for this report. The results of the social worker survey will be presented in a companion report later this spring.

The surveys that were designed for this evaluation included questions developed and published by the Search Institute in partnership with Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota.²

Demographic data from the time that the first pilot site was implemented (in August 2007) until the end of October 2009 were collected and analyzed. Financial data for fiscal year 2008/09 and the first 7 months of fiscal year 2009/10 were also collected and analyzed.

Characteristics of youth referred to Kinnections

From the time that the first Kinnections pilot site was implemented in August 2007 until the end of October 2009, 77 youth were referred to the program. Of the 77 youth who were referred to the program, 62 completed the intake phase. Of those youth, 32 were matched with a mentor and 30 were waiting to be matched.

Of the 32 youth who were matched with a mentor, 84% were either currently or previously in care under a continuing custody order, and the remaining 16% were receiving or had received support services for youth or were under a Youth Agreement. Most of the 30 youth waiting to be matched (80%) had been waiting more than 3 months for a mentor to be identified.

At the provincial level, the target population for the Kinnections program is almost evenly split between males (47%) and females (53%), and referrals to Kinnections have followed a similar pattern. However, the sub-group of 32 youth who were matched with a mentor had a much higher proportion of females (63%) than males (37%).

The ages of the 77 youth referred to Kinnections ranged from 13 to 22 years, with the majority (77%) falling somewhere between 17 and 20 years of age. The sub-group of youth who were matched with a mentor had a similar age range.

The proportion of Aboriginal youth referred to Kinnections is slightly higher than the proportion of Aboriginal youth in the provincial target population for the program.

Aboriginal youth were also slightly more likely to be matched with a mentor than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. However, more non-Aboriginal youth than Aboriginal youth were surveyed for this evaluation.

Youth survey results

More than 80% of the 17 youth who were surveyed for this evaluation were either currently or previously in care under a continuing custody order, and the remainder were receiving or had received support services for youth, or were under a Youth Agreement.

When the survey was conducted in December 2009, the average length of time that these young people had been with Kinnections was 7 months. Eight had been in the program for less than 6 months, 4 were in the program between 6 and 12 months, and the other 5 had been in the program for more than one year.

Eight of the 17 youth surveyed had heard about the program from their social worker, and 7 had been referred by their social worker. Two of the youth had referred themselves, and the rest were referred by various other people, including child care workers, teachers and foster parents.

Most of the youth (69%) reported that they knew what Kinnections was about, and 65% said they knew what was expected of them, prior to joining the program. A great majority of youth (82%) also indicated that they had their own expectations when they joined the program, and all said that their expectations had been met.

When you first joined Kinnections, what were your expectations?

- ◆ Hang out, have fun, do things I haven't done before
- ◆ Get out of the house, meet new people, do more stuff
- ◆ Make a friend, someone who could be there for me, a positive influence on my life
- ◆ Get help with life skills, learning abilities, living on my own

Most of the youth (82%) had one mentor during the time they had been in the program, and 29% knew who they wanted to have as a mentor prior to joining the program. Almost all of the youth reported that they felt comfortable discussing with Kinnections staff any problems they had with the program or their mentor.

About two-thirds of the youth indicated that they met with their mentor (face-to-face) at least once a week, and most youth (65%) reported that get-togethers with their mentors usually lasted between 2 and 4 hours. Along with meeting in person, the youth tended to connect with their mentors through regular phone calls.

The vast majority of youth (94%) indicated that they enjoyed getting together with their mentors "a lot" and had a lot of say in what they did when they got together with their mentors. In addition, most of the youth (71%) would have liked to spend more time with their mentors.

The youth reported very positive feelings about their mentoring relationships: 88% said they felt special when they were with their mentor; 94% felt important when they were with their mentor; and 100%

looked forward to seeing their mentor, liked the way in which they received advice from their mentor, and felt safe and comfortable with their mentor.

Almost none of the youth reported feeling sad, angry, or disappointed when they were with their mentor, although 18% reported that they felt bored. Despite some feelings of boredom, all of the youth indicated that their mentor thought of fun and interesting things to do.

What are some examples of activities you do with your mentor?

- ◆ Watch movies at the cinema
- ◆ Go for coffee, a meal, talk
- ◆ Trail walks, hikes, walks in the park
- ◆ Play guitar, build computers
- ◆ Go-carting, biking, weight room, work out
- ◆ Family activities, going to church, visiting aquarium, carving pumpkins, Christmas
- ◆ Having a spa day, haircut, nails done
- ◆ Help me find a job, looking for a place to live

Overall, the youth reported a high level of satisfaction with the program, and with their mentor. More than 80% said that they would not change anything about the program and all were satisfied with the relationship with their mentor. Most of the youth (88%) also felt that they would remain connected to their mentor for a long time.

How long is a long time for you?

- ◆ Not sure, more than 2 months
- ◆ Six months or more
- ◆ Over a year, a couple of years
- ◆ Five years, a few years
- ◆ A long time, as long as possible, until I'm ready to be on my own
- ◆ Until we grow old, forever

Mentor survey results

All 17 volunteer mentors agreed to participate in the mentor survey. Of these 17 volunteers, 16 actually completed the survey.

The mentors indicated that they had found out about Kinnections from various media, such as posters, flyers and advertisements, and from staff in the agencies that delivered the program. They also had a variety of reasons for volunteering to be a mentor.

Why did you choose to become a Kinnections mentor?

- ◆ To gain experience for future work, school, degree program
- ◆ Volunteering experience
- ◆ To make a difference in someone's life
- ◆ Always wanted to help youth
- ◆ Was a foster parent, still had a lot to offer, youth need someone in their lives
- ◆ Enjoy youth, always wanted to help youth, think mentoring is important for youth
- ◆ Because I was in care as well

On average, the 16 mentors who were surveyed had been involved with the program for about 11 months. Twelve of the mentors had been with the program for under a year, and the other 4 for a year or longer. Thirteen percent of the mentors had been mentored themselves at some point in their life, and 38% had been mentors in programs other than Kinnections.

Almost all of the mentors (94%) reported that someone had clearly explained what was expected of them when they volunteered to be part of the program. Eleven of these mentors had their own expectations when they joined the

program, and all but one reported having had their expectations met.

Most of the 16 mentors (88%) indicated that they had had enough training, and almost all (94%) said they had enough support from Kinnections staff, to help them meet the challenges of mentoring. All of the mentors said they felt comfortable talking to Kinnections staff if they had a problem with the program or the young person they were mentoring.

Half the mentors indicated that they met face-to-face with the youth they were mentoring about once a week. The meetings were usually 2 to 4 hours long. The majority of mentors (81%) enjoyed these meetings with the youth “a lot” and felt that the youth had a lot of choice in the activities they did together. Apart from face-to-face meetings, the mentors reported that they were in contact with the youth through regular phone calls.

The majority of mentors (88%) thought they would remain connected to the youth they were mentoring for a “long time,” which ranged from several years to a lifetime.

In general, the mentors indicated that they had received the right amount of information about the program and had the right amount of interaction with their Kinnections coordinator. Slightly more than half said they would like to have more interaction with other mentors and more information about the young person they were mentoring. The mentors also had suggestions for improving the program.

What changes do you think would improve the program?

- ◆ The program could provide more basic life skills activities and materials such as budgeting worksheets
- ◆ More training for the mentors, such as communications workshops
- ◆ More group activities for mentors and young people, more interaction with entire Kinnections group
- ◆ More sponsors, tickets for events, hard to find things to do on a limited budget

Caregiver survey results

Eleven individuals identified as caregivers of the youth who were surveyed participated in the caregiver survey. Five described themselves as foster parents and 3 said they were group home parents. One was a parent, and the remaining two were youth care workers.

All of the caregivers reported that they saw or spoke to the youth at least once a week, and most indicated that they saw or spoke to the youth every day or several times a week.

Most of the caregivers (73%) said that the youth had not talked to them about any problems he or she was having with the program or his or her mentor. Two indicated that the youth had talked to them about problems with the program, and one said the youth had talked about problems with the mentor.

The vast majority of caregivers (91%) thought that the youth enjoyed being in the Kinnections program, and most (82%) felt that the

youth’s connection with his or her culture and community had been strengthened as a result of the youth’s participation in the program.

Four of the caregivers reported that they had no expectations when the youth first joined the program. The remaining 7 reported that they had expectations and at least one of their expectations had been met.

When the young person joined Kinnections, what were your expectations?

- ◆ Youth would have somebody to confide in
- ◆ Youth would be motivated for school or a job
- ◆ Provide a female role model and mentor, and to support the youth
- ◆ Provide the youth with opportunity for outdoor physical activities, and a positive role model

The caregivers were also asked a series of questions about the mentoring relationship that were identical to the ones in the youth survey. They were asked to respond to the questions based on their observations of the youth’s relationship with the mentor.

The youth reported very positive feelings about their mentoring relationships, and the caregivers strongly agreed with the youths’ assessments of those relationships. Ten of the 11 caregivers (91%) responded affirmatively to all of the statements in this section of the survey.

For example, the caregivers agreed that the youth felt special when he or she was with the mentor, and

looked forward to seeing the mentor. They also thought that the mentor was someone the youth could trust, and that the youth could talk to the mentor about his or her problems and feel supported.

Most caregivers thought that the youth was spending enough time with his or her mentor, and all but one thought that the youth's relationship with his or her mentor would be a long-term relationship.

Six of the 11 caregivers also indicated that there were things about Kinnections that they thought should change.

Is there anything about Kinnections that you think should change?

- ◆ Making the program available for all youth in care
- ◆ Giving the mentors more money to do more activities with the youth
- ◆ More contact [for mentors] with caregivers and coordinators

Outcomes for youth

The youth, mentor and caregiver surveys had a common set of 24 statements describing changes in the youth that could be attributed to the mentoring relationship.

For the purpose of this evaluation, this set of statements was linked to one of the intended long term outcomes of the program: *Youth experience a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity*. This outcome statement reflects the Circle of Courage² model of youth empowerment on which the Kinnections program is based.

In this part of the surveys, the respondents were asked to indicate whether each of the statements

was true or false, or there was no change because it was fine to begin with. The mentors had the additional option of saying that they didn't know or were unsure whether there had been any change, and the caregivers had the option of saying that they didn't know or hadn't noticed whether there had been any change.

In the analysis of the responses, each of the statements was assigned to one of the four values in the Circle of Courage (i.e., belonging, mastery, independence and generosity) based on descriptions in background documents provided by the provincial coordinator of the Kinnections program.

Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging is described as the outcome for a youth who has a network of relationships with caring adults. These adults serve as teachers, and nurture the youth's development.

In relation to this outcome, the vast majority of youth (82%), caregivers (82%) and mentors (100%) agreed that, as a result of the mentoring relationship, the youth felt there were people who would help them if they needed it.

All of the mentors, most of the caregivers (91%) and more than half of the youth (52%) also agreed that the youth felt there were adults who cared about them. (Most of the other youth reported no change in this area because things were fine to begin with.)

In addition, almost half of the youth (47%) reported that they got along better with family and friends as a result of the mentoring relationship, while slightly more

than half (53%) indicated that things were fine to begin with in this area of their lives.

Most of the mentors were either unsure about the effects of the mentoring relationship on the youth's relationship with family and friends (25%) or agreed with the youth that things were fine to begin with (37%).

In contrast, a majority of caregivers (73%) felt that the youth got along better with family and friends as a result of the mentoring relationship.

Sense of mastery

According to the program documentation, a youth achieves cognitive, physical, social and spiritual competence through mastery of his or her environment. Gaining wisdom and self-control is part of this aspect of development.

Most of the youth (71%) and mentors (81%) felt that, as a result of the mentoring relationship, the youth were better able to cope with stress. An even larger percentage of youth (88%) and mentors (88%) also felt that the youth knew where to go when they needed information. These were two areas in which there was strong agreement between the youth and the mentors.

A majority of the caregivers (82%) concurred that the youth knew where to go when they needed information, and most (64%) thought that the youth were better able to cope with stress.

However, there were some areas in which there was less consensus among youth, mentors and caregivers about the effects of the mentoring relationship on the youth.

For example, few mentors (19%) and caregivers (27%) agreed with the statement that, as a result of the mentoring relationship, the youth was going to school better prepared (such as having homework done) and almost a third of the mentors (31%) thought that this statement was false. In contrast, none of the youth thought that the statement was false and 41% said that the mentoring relationship had actually had a positive effect in this area. Another 53% of the youth said that there had been no change in their school preparedness, because it was fine to begin with, and 27% of the caregivers agreed with this assessment.

There was a similar pattern when it came to the youth being involved in more recreational and other activities, such as sports, music and spiritual activities. Generally, the youth felt that either there had been improvement or things were fine to begin with. The mentors, on the other hand, tended to be more sceptical: 20-25% disagreed with statements that indicated improvements in these areas.

In response to the statement, “I can express my feelings better,” 53% of the youth indicated that there had been no change because things were fine to begin with, however only 13% of the mentors and 18% of the caregivers agreed with that assessment. In contrast, the great majority of mentors (81%) and most of the caregivers (64%) thought that the mentoring relationship had resulted in the youth being better able to express his or her feelings, though fewer than half the youth (41%) felt the same way.

Sense of independence

A sense of independence is achieved when a youth learns to make judgments and choices without being coerced, which fosters the youth’s motivation to set and attain his or her own goals, and to take responsibility for his or her own failure or success.

In relation to this aspect of development, the majority of mentors (81%) and many of the youth (59%) and caregivers (64%) thought that the youth had higher expectations of him– or herself, although many youth (41%) thought there had been no change in this area because it was fine to begin with.

A similar pattern emerged in relation to the youth being better able to resist using alcohol and other drugs, and having a better attitude toward school: The majority of youth (53%) thought things were fine to begin with, while the mentors and caregivers were less sure.

Most of the youth (59%) also said that they were eating healthier foods as a result of the mentoring relationship, although only 31% of the mentors and 27% of the caregivers agreed with this statement.

However, there was strong consensus among the three groups of respondents that the youth were feeling more optimistic about their future. In this regard, the vast majority of youth (82%), mentors (81%) and caregivers (82%) agreed that, because of the mentoring relationship, the youth felt they had more options for their future. A large majority of youth (71%), mentors (69%) and caregivers (82%) also indicated that the youth looked forward to the future more.

Sense of generosity

In the program documentation, a sense of generosity (unselfishness) is linked to the attainment of altruistic values, such as sharing and community responsibility. This is described as one of the most important values associated with the model of youth empowerment on which the program is based.

A large majority of youth (82%), mentors (75%) and caregivers (82%) agreed that, as a result of the mentoring relationship, the youth thought it was important to try and help others. Some of the youth (47%), mentors (38%) and caregivers (36%) also thought that there had been some improvement in the area of leadership.

However, while most of the youth (53%) and almost half of the caregivers thought that things were fine to begin with in the area of leadership, none of the mentors agreed with this assessment.

Similarly, more than half the youth (53%) and caregivers (55%) responded affirmatively to the statement, “Others see me [the youth] as more responsible,” but only a third (31%) of the mentors agreed and another third (37%) were unsure.

Financial analysis

An analysis of budgets, expenditures and caseloads for the overall program and each of the three pilot sites was undertaken as part of this evaluation. Expenditures were analyzed by category, and the feasibility of operating the program at full capacity, within the given budget, was gauged based on current spending and caseload growth patterns.

Budget

The original Kinnections annual budget of \$420,000 was developed in collaboration with the three partner service providers: PCRS, PLEA and UNYA. It was intended to support an ongoing caseload of 90 youth-mentor matches. This initial budget was adjusted downward slightly in 2009/10, as a result of a large surplus in the previous fiscal year.

Table 1

Fiscal Year	Budget (\$K)	Actual Expend. (\$K)	Surplus (\$K)	Variance as a % of Budget
2007/08	230.1	230.6	(.5)	0%
2008/09	420.0	316.5	103.5	25%
2009/10	402.0	324.5*	77.5*	19%
Total Program	1,052.1	871.6	180.5*	17%

*Projections based on April 1 to Oct. 31 2009 spending

The Kinnections pilot sites were implemented in the middle of the 2007/08 fiscal year. In that year, the \$420,000 annual budget was pro-rated based on each pilot site's start date. Expenditures were not tracked and the agencies billed the Ministry to budget.

In 2008/09, financial tracking was in place and the program cost significantly less to operate than the amount budgeted. This is not surprising given that new programs

Table 2

Expenditure Category	% of 2008/09 expenditures	% of 2009/10 expenditures (to Oct. 31)
Wages & Benefits	70%	67%
Mentorship activities	2%	3%
Staff & Mentor Transportation	2%	1%
Training and Prof. Dev. for Mentors	2%	2%
Advertising	2%	5%
Facility Costs	8%	10%
Administration Costs	13%	12%
Miscellaneous	1%	0%

Note: facility costs include office space, utilities, computer and office supplies.

often require time to build up their caseloads.

Table 1 shows a narrowing surplus from 2008/09 to 2009/10, meaning that expenditures are set to increase in 2009/10 despite a reduced budget. This pattern is not visible in all three pilot sites: One site's spending to October 31, 2009 accounts for most of the increase in expenditures, and another site's spending for the same period indicates that it will likely

spend less than it did in 2008/09.

At the 2009/10 fiscal year end, two of the three pilot sites are expected to have a surplus, and the third site is expected to spend its entire

budget.

Expenditures

For the purpose of this evaluation, program expenditures were divided into eight categories, as shown in Table 2. Each category was assigned a fixed or variable cost type. Fixed costs are not tied to caseload, so they remain relatively flat no matter how many youth are participating in the program. Variable costs, on the other hand, are directly tied to the client

base and fluctuate with the active caseload numbers. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of program expenditures in 2008/09 and 2009/10. Variable costs are highlighted in the table.

In both fiscal years, almost 95% of program expenditures were fixed costs, with wages and benefits accounting for at least two-thirds of the total expenditures. Despite the projected overall surplus in 2009/10, all three pilot sites were slightly overspent in the administration costs category, and two of the three sites spent more on facilities costs than they had budgeted.

All of the pilot sites have had, and continue to display, large surpluses in the variable cost categories. These surpluses are driven mainly by the fact that actual caseloads fell short of what had been budgeted for in both fiscal years.

Caseload

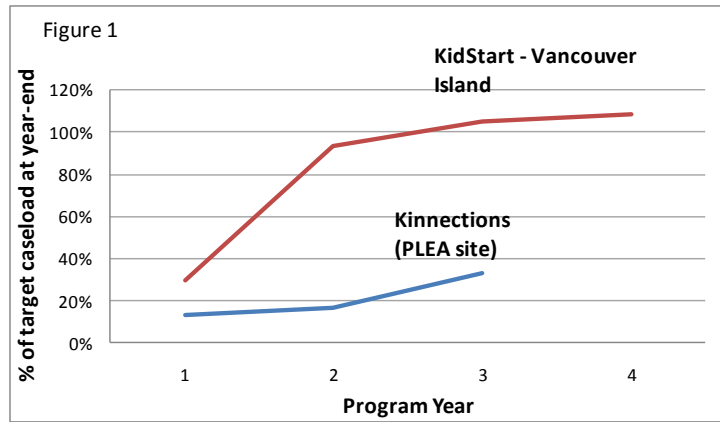
One of the most accurate ways of measuring the program's output is to look at "youth-month" units, which are the sum of the number of active months each youth was in a mentoring relationship. For example, if one youth was in a mentoring relationship for two months, this would count as two units. Should two youth benefit from a mentoring relationship for two months, this would count as four youth-month units. Table 3 shows the Kinnections direct youth activity, or output, in youth-month units for 2008/09 and the first 7 months

of 2009/10, and compares it to the levels that were budgeted for.

The program’s current budget, including fixed costs, translates into a projected monthly cost-per-youth mentored of \$370. However, in the first 7 months of 2009/10, the actual monthly cost-per-youth mentored was closer to \$1175. Any increase in direct youth activity would improve the program’s cost efficiency since it involves a larger base over which to distribute the fixed costs. While all of the pilot sites successfully managed to increase their output in 2009/10, they are still far from meeting the program’s budgeted caseload target.

If Kinnections were to reach its full budgeted caseload target in 2009/10, spending patterns from April to October 2009 indicate that two of the three pilot sites would be able to sustain a full caseload within their current budget. The third site, which diverted some of its client activities budget into additional advertising, should be able to adjust its spending, if its caseload were to reach capacity. This means that current program budget levels are sufficient to sustain the budgeted caseload target.

To provide perspective on the Kinnections caseload over time, caseload growth for the PLEA Kinnections site was compared to



caseload growth for KidStart Vancouver Island, a mentoring program that was developed by PLEA, and implemented a year earlier than Kinnections by two organizations on Vancouver Island, in partnership with PLEA.

KidStart Vancouver Island is described as a prevention and diversion program for children 6 years of age and older that provides adult volunteers to mentor or “coach” vulnerable children and youth on a one-to-one basis. The program is delivered from two sites on Vancouver Island, and each site has a caseload target of 30 matches.

Figure 1 displays caseloads for both programs as a percentage of their targets. It shows that PLEA’s Kinnections caseload has had slower growth than that of KidStart Vancouver Island. While KidStart Vancouver Island reached its target of 60 matches in year 3, the PLEA Kinnections caseload is still far from reaching its target of 30 matches.

Some of the difference in caseload growth rates is likely explained by differences in populations served and referral sources. KidStart provides services for both vulnerable children and vulnerable youth (though not necessarily those who are in care) and accepts referrals from a wide range of sources. Kinnections, on the other hand, serves only youth and primarily those who are in care and on Youth Agreements, and has fewer referral sources. This raises the question whether the Kinnections caseload target of 30 matches per site, which is identical to the KidStart per site target caseload, is too aggressive given these constraints.

Table 3

Fiscal Year	Budgeted Capacity	Actual Activity	% of Budgeted Capacity
2008/09	1080	146	14%
2009/10 (to Oct. 31)	630	161	26%

Summary of key findings

This evaluation was intended to provide an understanding of the costs of piloting the Kinnections program in relation to the benefits of the program for the youth involved.

To gain an understanding of the benefits of the program, survey interviews were conducted with a sample of youth, mentors and caregivers to measure their perceptions of the program, the quality of the mentoring relationships that were formed and the effects of the mentoring relationships on the youth.

To gain an understanding of the costs of delivering the program, a monthly *cost-per-youth mentored* was estimated based on financial and caseload data for the 2008/09 fiscal year and the first 7 months of the 2009/10 fiscal year.

Overall, the evaluation found a high level of satisfaction with the program and mentoring relationships among the youth and mentors. This finding was supported by a majority of caregivers, who reported that the youth enjoyed being in the program and looked forward to seeing their mentors.

While the level of satisfaction with the program was high, so was the cost-per-youth mentored. In the first 7 months of 2009/10—the program’s second year of operation—the actual cost-per-youth mentored was three times higher than had been projected based on the program budget for that year. This was explained by a high proportion of fixed costs and a smaller than projected caseload. While the budget was intended to support an active caseload of 30 matches in each of the three sites, by October 2009 only 32 matches had been achieved for the three sites combined.

Citing developmental and other scientific research evidence, the Kinnections program aims to strengthen the resilience and cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual development of youth in care by applying the concept of mentoring to this vulnerable population. A series of questions designed to measure the perceptions of youth, mentors and caregivers about the

effects of the mentoring relationship in relation to some of these desired developmental outcomes was used in this evaluation, with interesting results.

While the youth generally described more aspects of their lives as being fine to begin with than did the caregivers and mentors, there was also a high level of agreement among the three groups on the effects of the mentoring relationship in a number of key areas. In particular, the three groups of respondents agreed strongly that the mentoring relationship had had a positive effect on the youth’s sense of belonging; specifically, their sense that there were people who cared about them and to whom they could go for help. There was also agreement about the positive effects of the mentoring relationship on the youth’s relationships with their family and friends, further strengthening their sense of belonging. Positive effects were also reported in terms of the youth knowing where to go to get the information they needed, and in their capacity to cope with stress. In addition, the respondents agreed strongly that the youth felt they had more options for their future and looked forward to the future more. Combined, the responses conveyed a very positive picture of the effects of the mentoring relationship in supporting desired developmental outcomes.

There was much less agreement among respondents about the effects of the mentoring relationship on the youth’s ability to resist using alcohol and other drugs, their attitude toward school, and their diet. When asked whether the mentoring relationship had brought about improvements in these areas, the youth were generally more optimistic than the mentors and caregivers.

Conclusion

While the costs of delivering the Kinnections program are high relative to its output, the mentoring relationships that were formed appear to have had a very positive effect in key areas of development for most of the youth involved. A review of fixed costs associated with delivering the program in the three pilot sites and of recruitment issues that appear to be affecting caseload growth would be needed to find ways to improve the program’s cost efficiency.

RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

4th Floor—777 Broughton Street
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9S3

Phone: 250-387-7600
Fax: 250-387-7618

E-mail: Dulcie.Fernandes@gov.bc.ca

Endnotes:

1. Nota Bene Consulting Group. (2009). *Kinnections Pilot Program Evaluation Report*. Prepared for Ministry of Children and Family Development.
2. Saito, R.N. (2001). *What’s Working? Tools for Evaluating Your Mentoring Program*. Retrieved from: http://www.searchinstitute.org/free_downloads/Whats_Working_Eval_Toolkit.pdf
3. The Circle of Courage is a model of youth empowerment developed by Martin Brokenleg, Larry Brendtro and Steve Van Bockern, who are also the co-founders of Reclaiming Youth International. The model is supported by contemporary research, the heritage of early youth work pioneers and Native philosophies of child care. Retrieved from: http://www.reclaiming.com/content/about-circle_of-courage