



RESEARCH RUNDOWN

Evaluation of a Pre-Kindergarten Behavioural Intervention Pilot Program

We analyzed service data and surveyed stakeholders about the Pre-Kindergarten Program at St.Amant. We counted how many skills children gained, and measured change in adaptive and problem behaviours. We also asked consumers how satisfied they were. We found that children learned new skills and adaptive behaviours increased, but problem behaviours did not improve. Also, many stakeholders were satisfied with the program.

What is this research about?

Early intensive behavioural intervention (EIBI) is the most effective treatment for children with autism spectrum disorder. Most research agrees that EIBI programs produce the best results when delivered for 25–40 hours per week for approximately 2 years. Growing service demands and funding realities have forced services providers to devise alternatives. In response to an extensive waitlist of children (who risk "aging out" without service at age 5), St.Amant Autism Programs developed and piloted the Pre-Kindergarten Program (PKP) in 2016. The PKP provides behavioural intervention in a classroom setting to help prepare children to enter the school system. The program served 19 children, was 7 months long, and offered 20 hours of service a week.

What did the researchers do?

We studied the results of assessments conducted by the service staff. To measure skill acquisition, staff developed a School Readiness Questionnaire (SRQ). They consulted with kindergarten teachers to identify skills that are important for success in kindergarten. These included communication skills, self-care and safety skills, and classroom skills. Both staff and parents completed the SRQ.

To measure adaptive and problem behaviours, staff used the Scales of Independent Behaviours-Revised (SIB-R) and Assessment of Basic Learning Abilities-Revised (ABLA-R).

We also sent satisfaction surveys to consumers and the extended community. The surveys asked how satisfied

What you need to know:

Students in the PKP learned school readiness skills, and improved in their adaptive behaviours and basic learning abilities, while problem behaviours did not improve. Overall, stakeholders were generally satisfied with the goals, procedures, and outcomes of the PKP except for the clinicians.

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What did the researchers find?

School Readiness Skills

Staff completed the SRQ at the start and end of the program. On average, students had 39% of the target skills at intake and 60% at exit, an improvement of 21%. This gain was statistically significant.



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Parents also completed the SRQ. On average, parents indicated their children had 53% of the skills before entering the PKP and 71% of the skills upon exit, an increase of 18%. This improvement was also statistically significant.

Adaptive and Problem Behaviours

Adaptive behaviour and problem behaviour scores on the SIB-R were available for most students. We found a statistically significant increase in adaptive behaviours from intake to exit. Problem behaviour scores did not improve from intake to exit.

A total of 13 students had both an intake and exit ABLA-R assessment. The ABLA-R measures a small set of basic skills that are required in many daily tasks. Students' ability to learn these skills showed a statistically significant improvement.

Stakeholder Satisfaction

A total of 43 stakeholders responded to our satisfaction surveys. Parents, Autism Programs staff, and Daycare staff were all highly satisfied with the program. Family social workers were moderately satisfied, and clinicians outside the program were the least satisfied group. Although the clinicians did not find the goals, procedures, and outcomes of the PKP very acceptable, they did say that the PKP is a very important program. An area for improvement commonly identified was the need for greater parent involvement in the PKP.

Why is it important?

EIBI is the most evidence-supported intervention for children with autism, but many families face a long wait list. It is critical to examine service models that may help to meet this need.

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Additional Resources

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Project completed 2017.

Please see: <http://stamant.ca/research/our-research/project-summaries/> for more project summaries.