Neighbourhood Matters, But How Much?

Friday, March 7, 2003 – The Family Network's groundbreaking study, ***What Is the Best Policy Mix for Canada's Young Children?*** (CPRN Study No. F|09, 1999), identified three enabling conditions for good outcomes for children: adequate income, good parenting, and supportive communities.

There is evidence that better services for children improve their outcomes, programs directed at parents improve parenting, and ensuring families have adequate incomes provides access to a host of options from better housing and nutrition to better education and recreational facilities – all with a positive observable impact on children.

But the individual circumstances of a child and her family do not, on their own, explain her achievements or life success (or lack thereof). What about the impact of the third enabling factor – a supportive community or neighbourhood? A new discussion paper from the Family Network examines what we know and don't know in answer to that question.

The Well-being of Children: Are There "Neighbourhood Effects"?, by Caroline Beauvais, Researcher, and Jane Jenson, Director of the Family Network and Canada Research Chair in Citizenship and Governance at the Université de Montréal, has three objectives:

- To update the state of knowledge on neighbourhood effects and suggest where conclusions might be drawn and where further research is needed.
- To review a number of pilot projects in Canada and abroad that are based on the principle that the neighbourhood has a real impact on child development.
- Based on the above, to provide tools for policy-makers seeking to improve child outcomes by intervening at the neighbourhood and community level.

The authors agree with those who caution against overemphasizing the "neighbourhood effect". They acknowledge the evidence that the impact of the individual family, as well as direct intervention and services for children are clearly most influential for child outcomes. Nonetheless, they conclude that while the neighbourhood effect may be secondary and indirect it is still very real.

The challenge for future research is to do a better job of uncovering the links between specific neighbourhood qualities and the success of the child.