



The entire January 2004 issue of Children and Youth Services Review is devoted to articles by A.J. Reynolds, S.Ou and W.M. Barnard summarizing and discussing findings from the Chicago Longitudinal Study of 1539 children born in low income neighborhoods in Chicago in 1979 -80 and then followed by researchers for 18 -21 years. These children were 93% African American and 7% Hispanic. Each of these children participated in the Child -- Parent Center Program, a comprehensive school based early childhood intervention (ECI), or were a part of the comparison group enrolled in the usual kindergarten programs offered by the public schools. This study tracked school performance, children's well being and the development of social competence in a rigorous attempt to discover the potential benefits of high quality early education programs and to understand the pathways and causal factors in determining program effects. Data was collected to age 21 from a variety of sources, including schools, courts, child welfare agencies, along with interviews with the children and parents themselves.

Child Parent Centers were located in most of the poorest neighborhoods; 67% of children in the study resided in low income families. This study, one of the most rigorous studies ever conducted on early childhood education, found large positive differences for the children enrolled in the Child Parent Centers (CPC) in juvenile arrest rates (16.9% vs. 25.1%), grade retention by age 15 (23% vs. 38.4%), special education (14.4% vs. 24.6%), child maltreatment (6.9% vs. 14.2%) and high school completion by age 22 (65.3% vs. 55.1%) compared to children enrolled in kindergarten. "These impacts translate into an economic return to society of \$7.14 for every dollar invested in the CPC preschool component." "School age and extended intervention components also led to benefits that exceed costs." The researchers comment on the high quality of the early intervention programs based on the CPC model and on child literacy and family support services offered within and outside of CPC.

This study found that "Neighborhood poverty was the most consistent moderator of program effects." "Children who attended programs in the highest poverty neighborhoods benefited more than children who attended programs in low poverty neighborhoods." Furthermore, "Each additional year of program participation was associated with a 2-3 month advantage in (school) achievement and a 3-4% reduction in grade retention." Children who participated in preschool programs had arrest rates 50% lower than children with no preschool education. In other words, the earlier children entered CPC and the longer they remained in the program the better the educational and social outcomes.

These researchers confirmed the conclusions of the February 1965 report on Head Start: "It is clear that successful programs of this type must be comprehensive, involving activities associated with the fields of health, social services and education." " .. The

program must focus on the problems of child and parent and that these activities need to be carefully integrated with programs for the school years.”

This study also found that early childhood intervention programs are effective when they lead to better cognitive development, have high rates of parent participation, include a range of family support services and were supported by good schools. The quality of schools had the greatest effect in explaining the relationship between ECI and high school graduation.

It is difficult to imagine prevention research findings more positive than the ones summarized in these articles. What is most impressive is the range of effects and the researchers' careful analysis of causal pathways. These articles are describing in detail a powerful cost effective approach to furthering child safety and child well being outcomes (including reduced child maltreatment) for the most vulnerable children in our society.