Manitoba Centre for Health Policy

Setting Kids on a Path to Success – Participation in Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg

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A summary of the report *Health, Social and Education Outcomes of Children Participating in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg, a Retrospective Cohort Study using Linked Administrative Data*

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Research conducted in partnership with the
Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg

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INTRODUCTION

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada give children and youth a safe, supportive place to learn, grow and play. The Clubs are run out of schools and community centres in cities and towns across the country. In Winnipeg, there are twelve Boys and Girls Clubs, located in areas where the need for programs serving children and youth is the greatest. Their programs are offered after school, and are free of charge to young people aged 6-18.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg's core program areas include:

- Sports and physical recreation
- Arts and cultural appreciation
- Education and career exploration
- Healthy awareness life skills development
- Leadership and service to community

The impact of the Boys and Girls Clubs is clear from the many success stories shared by kids, youth and adults who grew up attending the Clubs. The staff and volunteers who work at the Clubs also see the difference the Clubs can make in kids' lives. But in the 40+ years that the Winnipeg Clubs have been active, there has never been a research study to measure that impact using numbers and statistics. To this end, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg asked researchers at the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy to study the children and youth participating in their Clubs. This independently funded research study with independent analysis provides evidence of what programs are working well and also points out what could be improved.



The study asked:

- ***Who are the children and youth the Clubs are serving?*** What are their home and family lives like? What kind of challenges might they face?
- ***Is participating in the Clubs linked to better outcomes for children and youth?*** Is participating linked to better health, performing well in school, or a lower risk of becoming involved in the justice system?

BACKGROUND

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) is home to a large Data Repository, a collection of data about the residents of Manitoba that can help answer these kinds of questions. The Repository has information on Manitobans' age, sex, income and postal code from birth or from the time they moved to Manitoba. The information in the Repository also records every contact Manitobans have with the healthcare system, social services, the education system and the justice system. Researchers at MCHP can link these data together to find out, for example, how often Manitobans who live in different parts of the city visit their family doctors, or how well children from lower and higher income neighbourhoods do in school.

The people whose information is in the Repository are never identified as individuals. To protect their privacy, all names and addresses are removed before the data are brought into the Repository. The data are linked together using scrambled numeric codes. This means we can do research studies on groups of people without ever knowing exactly "who" the individuals in each group are.

For the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg study, we started by linking attendance records from the Clubs to the Repository. The attendance records told us when and how often a child or youth participated in one of the Clubs' programs. For example, one child might have attended a drop-in program twice a week for about a year. Another might have signed up for an enhanced program, and participated three days a week for eight weeks in a row. We tallied all the visits children and youth made to the Clubs, counting each day they showed up as one visit.

Who are the children and youth who participate in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg?

Over the course of 11 years (2005-2016), there were 8,990 children and youth who made at least one visit to the Clubs. About half were male and half were female. Most participants lived in Winnipeg but a few lived outside the city. Most kids were between the ages of 5-12 when they participated in the Clubs, and they tended to visit more often when they were younger. Most of the children and youth who came to a Club were from families living in lower income areas of Winnipeg.

What is their home and family life like?

Looking back in time, we studied what participants' home and family life was like before they started coming to a Club. Among kids who visited a Club:

- About 44% had a mom who was a teenager when she had her first baby (provincial average is 6%).
- Almost 49% had a mom who had seen a doctor for a mood or anxiety disorder (provincial average is 20%). It's likely that many other moms struggled with mental illness without ever seeing a doctor.
- Nearly 49% were from families who had received services from Child and Family Services (provincial average is 9%), and 20% were from families who had previously had a child taken into care of Child and Family Services (provincial average is 4%).

From these findings, we can see that the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg are serving the children and youth most in need of their programs. They provide a safe and supportive after-school place for children and youth who may be facing challenging situations in their home and family lives.

FINDINGS

Is participating in the Clubs associated with better outcomes?

School Outcomes:

What we looked at: We looked at students' reading, writing and math scores in grade 3 and in grades 7/8. We examined student engagement in grade 7, a measure of how interested students are in learning and whether they take part in classroom activities. We also looked at graduation from high school in grade 12.

What we found and what it means: Participating in the Clubs was associated with doing well in math in grade 3 and being highly engaged in learning in grade 7 in a statistically significant way. This was the case even among children and youth who made as few as 20 visits to the Clubs. These results show that children aged 5-12 are in an important stage of their youth. They are growing, learning and becoming involved in many different activities. The Clubs' programs offer much more than help with school subjects. They may be fueling kids' creativity, helping them make friends, and teaching them new skills. These are important aspects not easily measured by reading, writing and math tests.

Health Outcomes:

What we looked at: We calculated the risk of teen pregnancies and of testing positive for a sexually transmitted infection (STI) among youth who participated in the Clubs. We compared them to youth of the same age and from the same neighbourhoods who had never been to a Club.





What we found and what it means: There was a statistically significant association between participating in the Clubs and both health outcomes we measured. The more a young person participated in the Clubs, the lower their risk of having a teen pregnancy or getting an STI.

Justice System Outcomes:

What we looked at: We calculated the risk of youth (age 12-17) becoming involved in a justice system incident – that is, being charged with a crime, becoming a victim of a crime or becoming a witness to a crime. We compared youth who participated in the Clubs to youth of the same age and from the same neighbourhoods who had never been to a Club.

What we found and what it means: There was a statistically significant association between participating in the Clubs and justice system involvement. The more a young person participated in the Clubs, the lower their risk of becoming involved with the justice system.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study show that children and youth who participate in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg's programs perform better in some areas of academics and are more engaged in learning than their peers. As well, participation in the Clubs' programs appears to protect youth against adverse social outcomes and risky health behaviours. The results of this study make a convincing case for the benefits that the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg provide for their participants, setting them on a path to success.

The importance of providing supports for children at a young age cannot be overstated. Programs like those offered by Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg can have a large impact on life-long health and well-being. Recognizing how these influences shape health and well-being across the life course and supporting the growth and development of children and youth in our province is essential for building a vibrant, successful society.

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