

Stakeholder Summary

Early Intervention Programs Should be Tailored to Specific Needs of the Community

Community-driven early intervention programs provide youth with the resources, support and information necessary to complete high school and transition into postsecondary education (PSE). These programs can be an effective tool in boosting PSE participation, particularly for groups less likely to pursue higher education. A new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) says that to be most effective these programs need to be generated out of, and adapted to, the specific needs of the communities they serve.

Project Description

Strategies for Supporting Youth Education: A Snapshot of Early Intervention Programs in Ontario examines six diverse community-based early intervention programs in Ontario: Jessie's – the June Callwood Centre for Young Women, Native Youth Advancement with Education Hamilton, YMCA – You Can Go, University of Toronto – Saturday Program and Summer Mentorship Program in the Health Sciences, Pathways to Education Canada and Wilfrid Laurier University – Building Bridges to Success. Interviews were conducted with program founders and leaders in late 2011 and early 2012 to examine their program offerings and the impact on relevant populations.

Findings

As previous HEQCO research has shown, Ontarians who come from low-income households, have parents with no PSE, live in a rural area, identify as an Aboriginal person, and/or have a disability are less likely to pursue higher education. As these groups all have very different barriers to access, the early intervention programs examined used a mix of services to cater their offerings to the unique needs of each youth. While some intervention strategies were clearly focused on overcoming the financial barriers to PSE, they also addressed the aspirations and academic preparedness of their students. Most programs made an effort to include peer support, which paired youth with others who have a similar background and/or challenges.

While the authors found each program had a strong anecdotal case for success, they repeatedly heard from program leaders of the challenges involved with systematic evaluations. However, the authors found that a focus on measurable outcomes would offer students, community members and researchers a valuable window on what works and how to best utilize limited resources.

Strategies for Supporting Youth Education: A Snapshot of Early Intervention Programs in Ontario was prepared by Fiona Deller and Sonya Tomas from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)