

Grounding in Community

More than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project Evaluation Report

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Prepared for:



**The Macaulay Child
Development Centre**

Promoting the well-being of children and their families

Prepared by:



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Grounding in communication (or common ground): the "mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual assumptions" that is essential for communication between people. (Clark & Brennan, 1991)

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
Project Description	7
Evaluation Description	10
Evaluation Findings.....	12
Participant Outcomes.....	12
Barber Outcomes	15
Combined Participant and Barber Outcomes.....	17
Strengths.....	18
Challenges	21
Recommendations	25
Conclusion	27
References.....	28

Executive Summary

The following report describes the evaluation findings of the Macaulay Child Development Centre's *More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project*. This evaluation was designed and conducted using a participatory approach, and, led by The Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR). Data was collected over a six month period between October 2008 and March 2009.

More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project started out in 2006, and it has grown in to a monthly program that offers discussion sessions for black fathers. It operates out of four barbershops in the Eglinton-Oakwood area of Toronto. The Macaulay Child Development Centre runs the program in cooperation with the barbers, facilitators, and leaders of the local black community.

CCBR is a non-profit research organization based in Kitchener, Ontario (www.communitybasedresearch.ca). The purpose of this evaluation was to understand the strengths and challenges of the project, to document to what extent intended outcomes are being achieved, and to suggest recommendations for strengthening *More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project*.

Outcomes

According to data collected, all of the intended outcomes identified for participants were achieved, in addition to some additional outcomes that were not anticipated. The following chart summarizes the outcome findings of the evaluation.

Outcomes Achieved by <i>More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project</i>			
Group Affected	Outcomes	Findings	
Participant Outcomes for Afro-Caribbean fathers	Intended Outcomes	Increased awareness of the importance of their role in healthy child/youth development	19 out of 22 questionnaire respondents shared that the project has had a positive impact on their awareness of the importance of their role as a father.
		Increased access to culturally appropriate fathering resources and information	15 out of 20 questionnaire respondents said that the project had exposed them to new culturally appropriate fathering resources. Staff and facilitators shared that each session includes information available for participants to take home.
		Increased parenting knowledge and skills	18 out of 20 questionnaire respondents reported having been exposed to new knowledge, while six of those reported having learned a lot from the discussions and the Barbershop Project. 17 out of 19 questionnaire respondents said that the Barbershop Project had a positive impact on their parenting skills.
		Increased access to one-on-one counselling with a social worker.	Four participants have accessed this resource.

Outcomes Achieved by <i>More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project (continued)</i>		
Group Affected	Outcomes	Findings
Participant Outcomes for Afro-Caribbean fathers (continued)	Unintended Outcomes	Increased exposure for fathers who would not have otherwise participated in important topics about black fatherhood.
		Several participants and staff noted that just by holding the discussions in the Barbershop, the project is reaching individuals they would otherwise not have reached.
		Some participants and staff said that participants reported having changed their parenting behaviours as a result of the program.
		Reinforced positive parenting skills that already exist
		Several participants indicated that sessions act as helpful reinforcement of what they already know, and provide a venue to articulate and debate viewpoints on parenting.
Barber Outcomes	Intended Outcomes	Increased capacity of local barbers to act as leaders and resources for Afro-Caribbean fathers
		All barbers interviewed for the evaluation indicated a profound impact on their role. 15 out of 19 participants said the project had an impact or a strong impact on the barbers capacity to act as leaders and resources for Afro-Caribbean fathers.
		Enhanced role of local barbershops as sites for mutual support and community building
		12 out of 19 participants said the Barbershop Project had an impact or a strong impact on the role of the barbershops to be sites for mutual support and community building.
Combined Outcomes	Intended Outcome	Engaged Afro-Caribbean fathers and barbers in developing and delivering key messages regarding the importance of positive parenting
		13 out of 19 participants agreed that the project has successfully engaged fathers and barbers in developing and delivering key messages about positive parenting.

Strengths

More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project is a highly innovative program. Evaluation findings suggest that the project is making a difference in the lives of fathers. This success appears to be due in large part to the fact that it has at its core a committed group of people who are passionate about its success. All involved see it as an important way of enhancing the local black community.

Challenges

Challenges experienced by the Barbershop Project include staff turnover, budgetary constraints, and overwhelming mainstream media attention. Although the project has been highly stakeholder-driven, the planning and decision making process to date has been somewhat informal. Stakeholders agree that the biggest challenge facing the project in the next year will be to further develop the decision-making structure and the vision for the future of this project in order to maintain the sense of community ownership.

Recommendations

The Evaluation Committee overseeing this evaluation make several recommendations based on the findings outlined in this report. They are detailed in this report, and they are intended for the Advisory Committee of *More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project* to review and implement.

Conclusion

More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project is a truly innovative program and it has been identified as successful by all stakeholders involved. As the project moves forward, it will need to clarify its scope and the degree to which the community members involved can influence and be involved in project operations and decision-making about project direction.

Introduction

North American mainstream media messages about black fathers are almost always negative, be they based in news stories or film and television dramas. Too often black fathers are all painted with the same brush. This affects perceptions not just outside of the black community, but has a harming affect on the black community as well. If black men only hear these negative stories about themselves without any positive influences to help them understand this exaggerated, narrow perspective, then the bad reputation is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

According to a leading Canadian scholar on black fatherhood, the need to counteract mainstream notions of black fatherhood cannot be underestimated. "In addition to systemic racism, the most significant impact on the psyche of Black men within the last 20 years has been the distortion and misrepresentation of Black men and 'blackness' within the mass media.... images of Black men as fathers get scripted and distorted. This new linear narrative of Black masculinity then becomes the normative view of Black men and fathers, a view that often gets internalized by members of the Black community, especially Black adolescents." (Thomas Bernard, 2008)

Black communities across North America are certainly meeting with success in counteracting those stereotypes, on an international level with the 2009 inauguration of the first black United States president and also on a neighbourhood level.

In a Toronto neighbourhood known as a hub of Caribbean culture with its specialty shops and restaurants, a parenting program for black fathers is one example of success in building and supporting positive messages about black fatherhood.

More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project started out in 2006 as a Black History Month event at a local barbershop and the community response was so strong that it evolved into an ongoing program offered at four barbershops.

Over the past three years, all staff, barbers, facilitators, and community members involved in the project have heard anecdotally that the program was making a difference for some participants, but they had not documented the impact in a comprehensive way. In order to better understand the impact, the Macaulay Child Development Centre (Macaulay), with agreement of the project's Advisory Committee, contracted the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR) to design and conduct an evaluation in 2008/2009.

CCBR is a recognized leader in community-based research in Canada (over 250 research projects during its 25 years of operation) and a pioneer in participatory action program evaluation. CCBR staff conduct research to study and to create social innovation balancing rigorous research with community relevance. CCBR is an independent, entrepreneurial and not-for-profit organization.

Project Description

More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project is a program designed to engage Afro-Caribbean fathers in meaningful dialogue about issues relevant to the role they play in their children's lives. Funded by the United Way of Toronto, the project was

spearheaded in the Eglinton-Oakwood area of Toronto by Macaulay. The concept was meant to be a one-time Black History Month event organized by staff at Macaulay in February 2006. They wanted to outreach to black fathers who were not well represented at the more traditional parenting groups, so a member of the planning committee suggested it would be easy to find large groups of men in the barbershops. Macaulay decided to organize a unique event by arranging a discussion about black fatherhood in a local barbershop. After the success of that first session, the barbers, participants, and Macaulay staff agreed to further develop the idea and together they created a program of monthly discussion sessions that now take place in four local barbershops.

The program is designed to bring trained facilitators who are black fathers and role models themselves into the barbershop once a month to generate discussions about different topics each month. The program builds on the existing collegial atmosphere among barbers and their customers in a familiar cultural setting to generate discussions on the important and often loaded topic of black fatherhood.

This unique project has identified several intended outcomes in relation to participants and barbers:

Intended Participant Outcomes for Afro-Caribbean fathers:

- Increased awareness of the importance of their role in healthy child/youth development
- Increased access to culturally appropriate fathering resources and information
- Increased parenting knowledge and skills

Intended Barber Outcomes:

- Increased capacity of local barbers to act as leaders and resources for Afro-Caribbean fathers
- Enhanced role of local barbershops as sites for mutual support and community building

Intended Combined Outcomes:

- Engaged Afro-Caribbean fathers and barbers in developing and delivering key messages regarding the importance of positive parenting

The project has multiple stakeholders who are all highly enthusiastic and passionate about the project. They see it as far more than just another parenting program; to them it represents a rare opportunity for making a positive impact on the local Afro-Caribbean community. Together they combine their expertise and enthusiasm to work toward achieving the intended outcomes.

Involved Stakeholders

Individuals involved in the project represent a range of stakeholder groups, including barbers, facilitators, participants, community leaders, Macaulay management staff, and the Project Coordinator. Representatives of each stakeholder group participate in the project Advisory Committee.

Twenty-four barbers in four barbershops in the Eglinton-Oakwood area of Toronto all welcome the project into their space. They promote the project with their clients and during sessions, they participate in discussions and encourage others to join in.

Four to five **facilitators** work on the project. They read the relevant research materials and collaborate to design sessions. Two at a time will facilitate one session, taking turns to ask questions and facilitate the discussions. They provide participants with real-life examples, drawing on their own experiences to model ways of approaching the discussion topics.

Most **participants** learn about the project by having been at the shop when a session was taking place, while others received flyers, saw posters, or heard through word of mouth. The informal nature of the project allows participants flexibility in choosing whether or not to actively take part in the discussions, to leave and come back, to leave contact information or not.

Community leaders were involved in the development of the initiative, and in providing guidance to project staff on an ongoing way.

Staff members from **Macaulay** include management staff, a Parent Education Support Worker, and the Project Coordinator. **Management staff** secured funding for the project. They oversee program delivery, public communication about the project and they are responsible to manage the funds and maintain a relationship with the funding organization. A **Parent Education Support Worker** from Macaulay assists with the project.

The **Project Coordinator** is responsible to build and maintain positive relationships and strong communication about the project with each of the barbershop locations, participants, facilitators, community members, Advisory Committee and Macaulay management staff. In supporting the work of the facilitators, part of the Coordinator's job is to coordinate facilitator schedules; plan for each session; determine future topics; and lead problem-solving as needed. A significant part of her role is to research, collect, and provide to facilitators culturally appropriate fathering resources and information relevant to each monthly topic. The Coordinator also sets up and maintains a presence at each Barbershop Session. In addition, she provides one-on-one counselling support to participants as needed.

In practice, the roles described in this section are somewhat fluid. The project has intentionally cultivated an informal style and all of the stakeholders involved support one another and use creativity in ways that help to make the project succeed. Most people interviewed for this project saw this informal structure as a strength of the project and consistent with barbershop culture.

A Snapshot View of a Barbershop Session

Each session takes place on a Friday evening or Saturday afternoon, the busiest times for a barbershop. The barbers advised to hold sessions at peak hours, as a strategy to gain wider exposure to potential participants. In this lively, informal atmosphere, people are constantly coming and going; barbers are cutting hair and shaving faces throughout the sessions.

A table is set up with resources such as articles, flyers, books, fact sheets available for participants to take with them. Light refreshments are also available to participants.

The Project Coordinator is a consistent presence at the sessions. She is a social worker, available to answer questions, share information, and to take self-referrals from participants who wish to discuss an issue one-on-one.

A Parent Education Support Worker is also available to provide answers and resources regarding questions specifically about children.

At the beginning of a session, the television is turned off, and facilitators usually pick up a microphone to introduce the Barbershop Project and its purpose. They establish the topic of discussion for that month (previous topics include self-esteem, children and media, Father's Day). They often provide an example of a dilemma they face in their lives and they ask participants in the room advice about how to handle such a situation. Facilitators use this and other techniques to build a sense of trust in the room.

Facilitators bring the microphone to participants, moving around the room and using a visual aid, such as a flip chart or video clip, or a spoken word piece to engage participants. They also give away two free haircuts each session as an incentive to encourage participants to answer difficult questions.

Participants offer their perspectives on the parenting topic of the day, and enter into critical discussions, often challenging each other's views. The conversations have a tendency to be heated at times, but the tone remains constructive. Facilitators guide the discussion forward, sharing information from the research they read to prepare for the day.

After two hours, the discussions are wrapped up by the facilitators, and participants and barbers might continue to talk in small groups, often revisiting these topics at later points to carry on the dialogue.

Evaluation Description

Between October 2008 and March 2009, the CCBR led the program evaluation for the Barbershop Project. The purpose of this evaluation was to document to what extent intended outcomes are being achieved, to understand the strengths and challenges of the project, and to suggest recommendations for strengthening *More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project*.

Consistent with other CCBR-led studies, this evaluation used a participatory action research (PAR) approach. PAR is defined as "a research approach that consists of the maximum participation of stakeholders, those whose lives are affected by the problem under study, in the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of taking action and making change" (Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin & Lord, 1998). PAR is a form of applied research that combines the traditions of participatory research and action research, while the values of PAR are strongly rooted in democracy, equality, liberation and change.

Three main mechanisms were used to implement this participatory action research approach in the Barbershop evaluation.

An *Evaluation Committee* was formed in order to have stakeholder involvement in decision-making about each step of the process. It was composed of all community stakeholders, and was set up to guide and advise the evaluation team on design, tool development, implementation plan, and emerging recommendations.

The *Evaluation Team* who conducted the research was a small group of researchers from CCBR who brought expertise in participatory program evaluation, community-based parenting programs, and included a team member who is a black father from the Afro-Caribbean community in Toronto.

Feedback from *all Stakeholders* in the research was essential to the evaluation because each perspective contributed to a full understanding of the program. Data gathering methods were carefully chosen in order to maximize the opportunities for all stakeholder voices to be represented.

The main research questions were:

1. To what extent has the project achieved its objectives (assessing impact)?
2. What are the project's strengths and challenges?
3. What can be done to improve the ability of The Barbershop Project to meet its objectives effectively?

The evaluation data was gathered with the methods and stakeholder involvement as outlined in the following table:

Method	Description	Involvement
<i>Document Review</i>	Program documents were reviewed, including visioning session documents; monthly summary reports; previously completed participant surveys	Project staff
<i>Key Informant Interviews</i>	Ten interviews were held with program staff and barbers. Selection criteria for interviews are outlined in Appendix A	Staff (n=3) Barbers (n=8)
<i>Participant Observation</i>	Members of the evaluation team attended five facilitated Barbershop sessions and wrote observational field notes relevant to the main evaluation research questions	Facilitators (n=5) Barbers (n=~14) Participants (n= ~60)
<i>Participant Survey</i>	Participants were invited to respond to a semi-structured survey by phone or in person	Participants (n=23)
<i>Focus Groups</i>	Three focus groups were conducted. One with all facilitators, and two with participants	Facilitators (n=4) Participants in 1 st group (n=9) Participants in 2 nd group (n=7)

For more details about these methods, and to receive a copy of these tools, please contact the Centre for Community Based Research.

Study Limitations

The evaluation included input from 23 participants, which represents only a fraction of the fathers reached by the program. Although every effort was made to include as many participating fathers as possible, resource and logistical limitations constrained us. Consequently, one limitation of this evaluation is that the perspectives presented in this report may not reflect the opinions of all program participants.

Another limitation is the bias inherent in self-reporting. We asked participants to self-report on the impact of the project on themselves as parents, but it was not within the scope of this study to speak to the children or other family members involved. We do not have concrete evidence that participants are applying their new knowledge in their interactions with their children.

Evaluation Findings

The following section provides a summary and analysis of all the data collected throughout the evaluation. The evaluation findings are summarized and organized in five main sections: participant outcomes, barber outcomes, combined outcomes, strengths, and challenges.

Participant Outcomes

Twenty-three participants were surveyed over a four-month period using a short interview questionnaire. Data from these surveys suggest that all of the intended outcomes identified for participants were achieved, in addition to some additional outcomes that were not anticipated.

One unintended outcome, for example, is that the **sheer exposure to the project** is itself making a positive impact on participants. Even for individuals who only participated in a handful of sessions, knowing there is a place to go to discuss topics was identified by participants as making a difference. One participant who joined in the discussions for the first time noted after dialogue and ideas were exchanged in the session:

“I just walked in to get a haircut...very educational, reaches out to the community.” (Participant)

“The magic of this project is that we are getting to black men . . . any other venue wouldn't be the same.” (Facilitator)

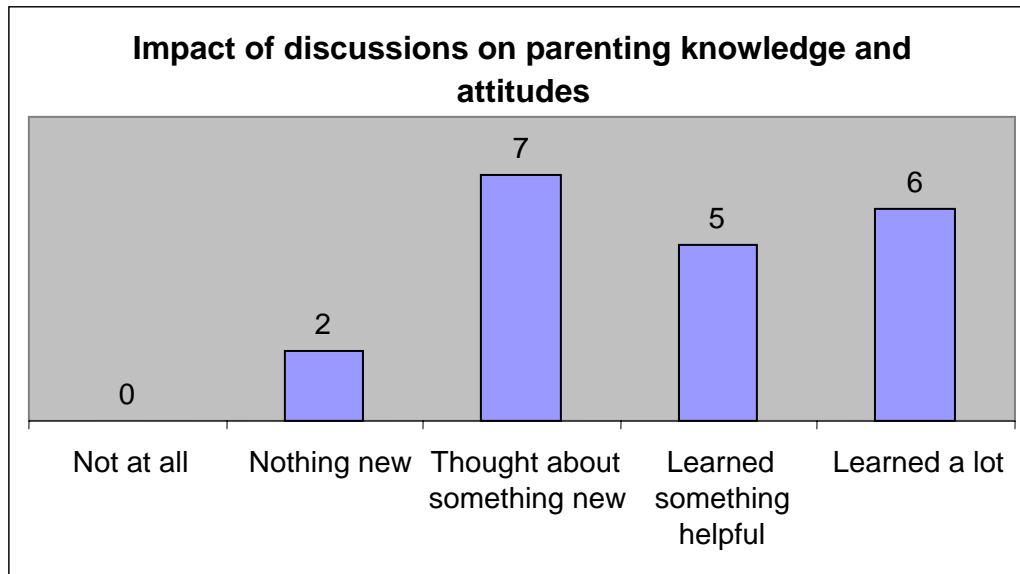
At the Barbershop sessions, **fathers learn about the importance of their role** in their children's lives. All participants, fathers or not, focus on the subject of fatherhood, and the importance of that role is reinforced.

“I've learned about how important it is to empower fathers to be positive role models.” (Participant)

In addition, fathers have reported having **gained new knowledge and shifted attitudes** about parenting as a result of the program.

“(I) learned things I never knew before.” (Participant)

The following graph demonstrates that 18 out of 20 respondents reported having been exposed to new knowledge, while six of those reported having learned a lot from the discussions and the Barbershop Project.



In addition to gaining new knowledge, participants reported having **changed some of their parenting behaviours** as a result of this project.

"I've learned a lot. I have given responsibilities to my daughter to make her feel like she is a responsible person." (Participant)

"Because of this program I stopped working overtime to spend more time with my kids." (Participant)

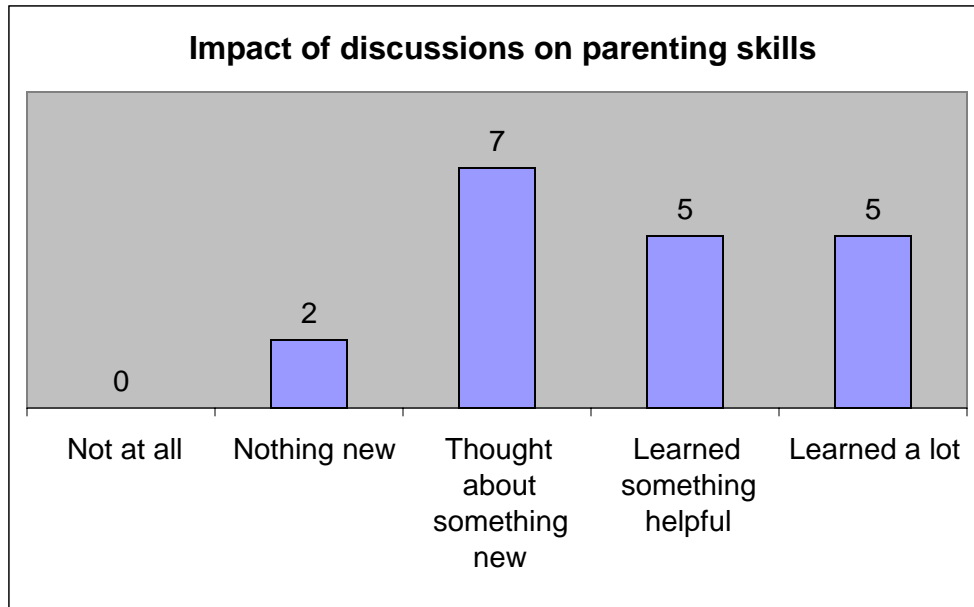
"After talking about being involved, I went tobogganing with my kids." (Participant)

"Things I thought will help my kids...was secretly hurting them...based on my upbringing." (Participant)

"Being a Father from the Caribbean many of the values are different in Canada, for example, child discipline. We have to adopt to the new practices.... 'new culture.'" (Participant)

"I was not a bad parent but the talks help out." (Participant)

Seventeen out of 19 respondents said that the Barbershop Project had a positive impact on their parenting skills.



While many fathers are learning new things at the sessions, several report having found the sessions **useful in reminding them of what they already know**, and serving as a touch-stone to keep them on track as a parent. This is another unintended benefit. The Barbershop Project helps reinforce positive parenting skills that already exist. At times, it is easy for parents to get caught up in taking care of multiple responsibilities in their lives and forget to take time out to think about their parenting strategies. This is not to say that they are irresponsible parents but at times people tend to get side-tracked with problems. The Barbershop Project helps to remind parents to prioritize their most important responsibility.

“Helped me know about things. I get busy and forget, so it reminds me to get back on track. Sometimes the sessions serve as a check-point, not just new information.” (Participant)

“Most useful to me was the reminder of how important it is to spend fatherly time with your child.” (Participant)

“It refreshes my memory about what to do.” (Participant)

Participation in the sessions helps fathers to self-articulate more clearly how and why they make certain parenting choices, and it **facilitates the sharing and debating of ideas about parenting**.

“The topics are very relevant and current issues. They look at race issues, male, gender, like today’s topic about kids and media is very important. My two boys are very connected to digital media. Some video games are inappropriate, and parents need a certain level of control. Some games should be off limits. I watch with my kids. These sessions help with talking about strategies for strong parenting.” (Participant)

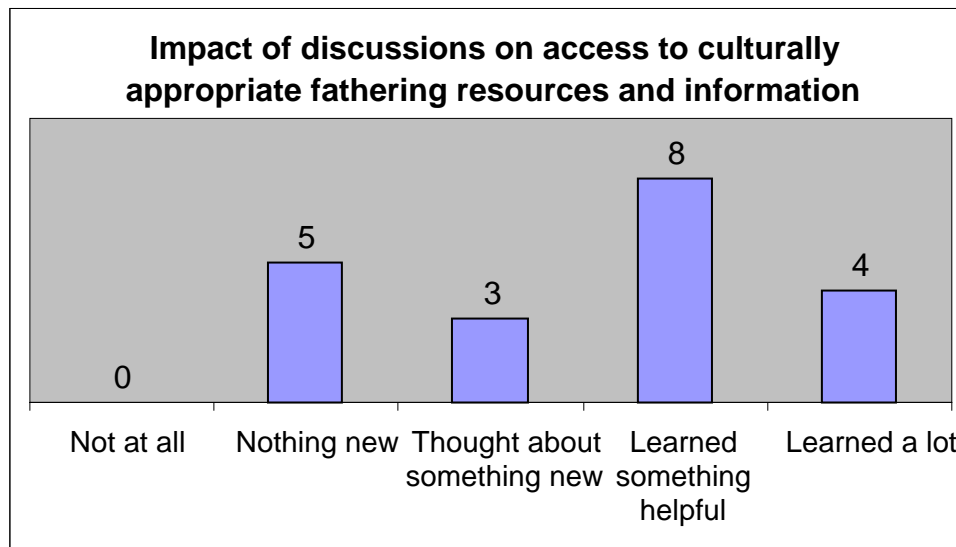
Even those that don't participate actively in the discussions **can benefit from just listening to the conversations**. One participant who had been to several sessions explained:

"Today is the first time I've said something, but I listen." (Participant)

He may not have spoken in the sessions before, but he had been actively listening.

Parents involved had **increased access to culturally appropriate fathering resources**. Each session topic is researched and designed based on articles and other resources. All efforts are made to find culturally appropriate resources whenever possible. These resources are made available to participants at the sessions. There is always something to take away from the session. Many fathers and father figures are introduced to new resources and services available to them.

Such resources are not always readily available, and in response to this shortage, the program has begun creating resources of their own. A fathering tips sheet was created based on Barbershop participant and barber advice, and a documentary film about the project was created.



The Coordinator is available to participants who would like to talk to a social worker one-on-one. Since she has a presence at the sessions, it makes it easier for people looking for extra support to make that connection. To date, four participants have taken advantage of that resource.

Barber Outcomes

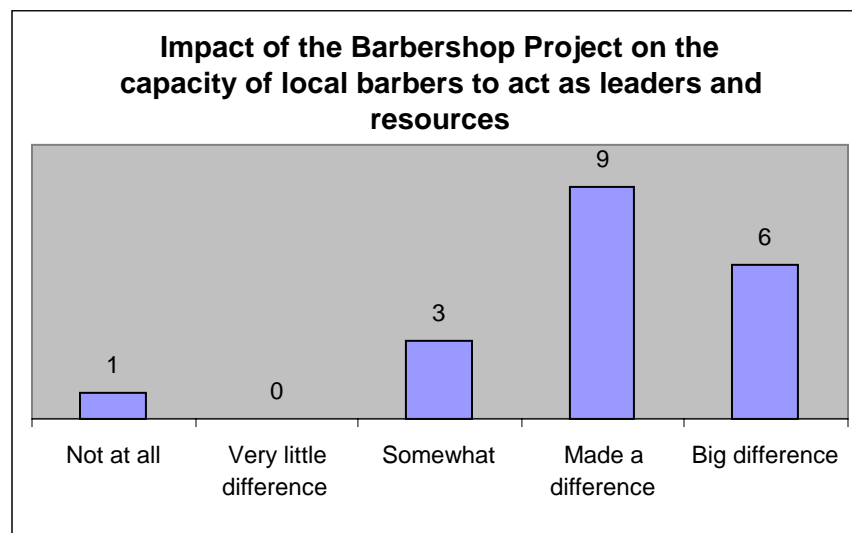
Eight barbers were interviewed as part of the evaluation. All barbers indicated that the project has made a significant impact on them as individual barbers and on the shops. The entire approach of this project has highlighted the prominent role of barbers in the community. Perhaps it should not be a surprise that the project is having a profound impact on the barbers involved. After all, they are present at every session, and many of

them are fathers themselves. The feedback from barbers has been quite positive, which is an indicator of note, since their support of the project's goals is critical to its success.

We know that barbers play many roles for their customers, ranging from an informal psychologist to a folk nutritionist. With this project, they have been given the opportunity to take on another role - that of a leader. Many of the barbers provide insights and ongoing feedback to the project staff concerning various aspects of the project. Often barbers will recommend future topics for discussion and they act as a role model for new participants when they participate in the Barbershop Sessions. Practices like those noted have given the barbers even more credit in the eyes of the project stakeholders. The barbers truly appreciate the fact that their points are respected and that they are contributing to the direction of the project.

“There is a purpose and I’m being heard.” (Barber)

Participants were asked in the survey questionnaire if they believe that the project has had an impact on the barbers’ capacity to act as leaders and resources for Afro-Caribbean fathers. On a scale of one to five, 75% of the participants answered in the affirmative.

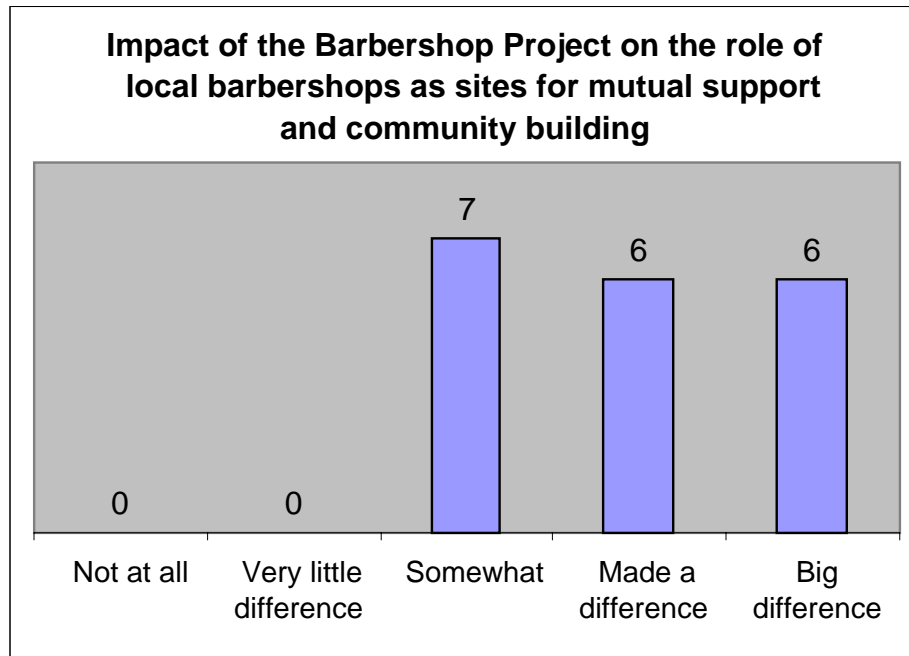


Another question asked of participants was about the impact of the project on the role of local barbershops as sites for mutual support and community building. Barbers agree that it has had a profound impact.

“Before the conversation was about sports, women, and politics... it has changed. Now it’s mostly about the kids.” (Barber)

The barbershop is a place where many different conversations take place, whether it be about sports, music or politics. As the barbershop project was introduced to the various barbershops, it has brought a new focus point to the discussions that normally took place at the shops. You now have participants/customers having dialogue with a heavy meaning and powerful outcomes. Using the barbershop as a platform has given more meaning and vigour to discussions about life in the barbershops. As demonstrated by

the following chart, participants also agree that the project is making a difference at the barbershops.



This project has helped to reinforce the barbers' status as highly respected community members. The results above clearly indicate this point.

"This program is growing and it is becoming a part of everyday conversations in the shops." (Barber)

Combined Participant and Barber Outcomes

All evidence points to significant impact on participants and barbers' development of discussions about positive parenting. Everyone involved learns from each other in the process.

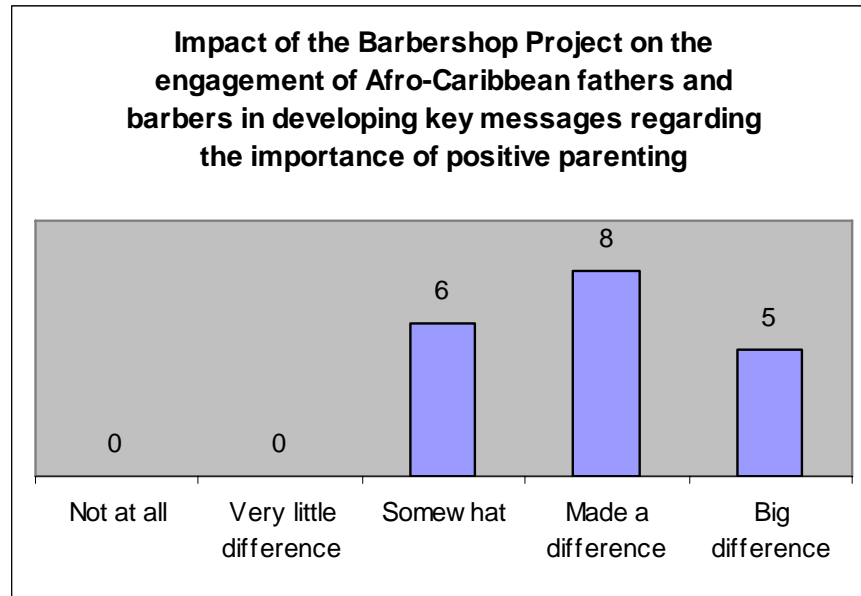
"For me, (I) learned a lot of things that I've changed. For example, instead of punishing my child with timeouts, we have no more timeouts. He listens more because I tried to be a lot more calm now, I remember each time I get angry to take a step back and breathe. People always blame the schools, but often the parents are teaching kids the wrong messages." (Barber)

"Each of these men I learn from...Everyone has something to offer...It's a platform to speak out for black men about hard issues." (Facilitator)

"I was more grumpy before. The kids used to get on my nerves. Now I am more patient with my kids." (Barber)

"Being patient, listen more and talk less." (Barber)

"I am stronger as a person as a result of the program." (Participant)



Strengths

More Than a Haircut: The Barbershop Project has numerous strong points. It is enhancing the black community with a committed group of people, in a unique setting. It is also offering high quality content using an informal facilitation style. The participants are exceptionally pleased with the program.

Black Community Pride in the Project

Although the project officially operates out of a service agency, the notion that it is created and run for black individuals, by black individuals is at the heart of the project.

“This project is F.U.B.U.: For us, by us.” (Facilitator)

“It’s an honour to be a part of it. It’s authentic. You are not in Jamaica but it’s pretty close. A lot of the guys are older, more experienced dads, so a lot of the time I’m learning.” (Facilitator)

Most of the participants and barbers acknowledge that the Afro-Caribbean community rarely sees opportunities for fathers or father figures to have constructive discussions about their children’s upbringing.

“It’s different because barbers and participants can relate to the facilitators because they look like us.” (Staff)

“People outside the community might not really get it...it goes beyond the Afro-Caribbean issue...we have voices, I don’t have to challenge myself.” (Staff)

Since mainstream news and entertainment images of black men are mainly negative, the fact that this project creates a positive space for black men to participate is quite significant. Aside from presenting an opportunity for an interesting good-news story

about black men in the media, stakeholders view the positive space as crucial because it is strengthening families and contributing to community development.

“We need things like that for Fathers.” (Participant)

“Its good to see when we get together for something positive.” (Participant)

“I believe the [project] is very important especially for black families.” (Participant)

Stakeholders from the local black community sit on the project’s Advisory Committee, and as a result they have taken on a sense of ownership of the project. The project relies on the fact that the black community has embraced it. Without the barbershops, without the support of the barbers and participants, without a black Project Coordinator, and without black male facilitators, this project would not exist.

Committed Group

The project team (which is mainly from within the Afro-Caribbean community), Macaulay staff, and community members are all passionate in their commitment to the project. They report having bonded together through the common purpose of building the project within the community.

“The team is working well. We have a common understanding beyond a regular working relationship because we are all committed to a long term goal of seeing this project grow. That’s part of the fabric that holds us together.” (Staff)

“With the growth of the program... I belong. I feel a sense of purpose. Whatever you acquire here, it keeps you for life.” (Facilitator)

There is a genuine quality to the way people interact with each other in the Barbershop Project.

The Setting

The setting of this project is probably its most intriguing aspect, and it is a strength in more than one way. Virtually anyone who learns about the Barbershop Project is drawn to its’ unique features and is eager to learn more. A parenting program for black fathers that takes place in a barbershop captures peoples’ attention and their imagination. Those that are not familiar with the barbershop culture may have a hard time understanding why that setting was chosen. Others who are aware of the informal, expressive nature of a barbershop, or have experienced first hand the lively barbershop discussions, would understand. In a place where everyone is entitled to their opinion, at ease to let their guard down and speak in their native dialect, letting *“their patois flow freely” (Facilitator)*, the venue seems the most natural location.

The barbershop location not only sets the stage for non-judgemental discussions, it also works as an indirect form of outreach; the sessions take place while participants are carrying out the casual duty of getting a haircut. They receive a haircut and a handful of information or strategies to help them with their parenting.

*“It’s very interesting because a lot of parents would not go to a parenting centre.”
(Participant)*

Relevant, Well-Researched Topics

The program combines this comfortable setting with relevant content. Information is shared with participants in a unique and well-researched way. The sessions encourage individuals to speak their minds and to listen to other ideas about how to raise children.

“What’s useful is everything...everything...instead of some normal barbershop talk you have something different.” (Participant)

“There are issues that are laid on the table you don’t normally hear people speak about.” (Participant)

The carefully chosen topics always have relevance to the participants’ lives in one way or another. Often, it is seasonally relevant, such as ‘fun and free events to go to with your kids over the holidays’ or it might be connected to current events, including ‘self-esteem’ which was chosen when Barack Obama was elected President of the United States.

One of the project’s plans is to compile all the articles and other resources that are researched each month and create a resource binder for participants and others to be able to access for educational purposes.

Informal Facilitation Style

The informal engaging style of facilitation helps people to discuss issues they would not normally talk about in public. The facilitators take a leadership role in modeling and encouraging a level of depth and authenticity in the discussions. They help the group stay on topic, but their role is also to allow for dialogue to take shape between participants.

“Good facilitators in opening up discussions.” (Participant)

Facilitators are not supposed to be ‘experts in the field’, but they are equipped with first-hand experience and research knowledge relevant to the monthly topics.

“If we’re lecturing it’s not going the way we need it to go.” (Facilitator)

“People having different things to say you learn from them and know your mistakes.” (Participant)

“Different perspective...from every person...you get information from what other people say.” (Participant)

Overwhelmingly Positive Participant Response

When participants were asked what they found to be the least useful about the Barbershop, or what they would change, no negative answers were given.

Challenges

Since the program began, the project has had many successes to celebrate, but it has faced challenges as well. Some of the challenges experienced by the Barbershop Project over the past three years are quite typical of piloted non-profit initiatives, such as staff turnover and budgetary constraints. Other issues identified, such as a larger program vision, balancing ownership with project structure, and media attention seem more particular to the specific context of this project.

Staff Turnover

The project has had three coordinators in three years, including a period when the position was vacant. As a result, the project suffered during those times from lack of consistency.

The facilitator role has also seen some turnover, so newer facilitators have not always had access to mentors within the project who can provide them with the training needed to help with the transition.

“Our new facilitators have been thrown into this. It’s hard to facilitate by trial and error. It’s hard for a facilitator to manoeuvre that space. We should work on facilitator training.” (Staff)

High turnover rates are not uncommon within the non-profit sector, perhaps in part due to the fact that staff tend to have far less resources available to them to accomplish their objectives than private or public-sector workplaces.

Need for Stronger Outreach to Participants

Although the program reaches many black men every month, organizers have noticed that there are less participants coming intentionally to the sessions on a regular basis. They say that sometimes individuals don’t know when the next sessions will be, or that they forget because once a month creates a long enough gap that people may forget.

“Used to do flyers – door to door, we need better marketing.” (Staff)

“We have identified we need a media person.... To deal with advertising and promoting.” (Staff)

Budgetary Constraints

At the time of data collection for this evaluation, stakeholders also identified resource limitations as a challenge. The project partners do not lack ideas for ways to strengthen the project, but these ideas also need resources.

“We really want to do more, (but) it’s the question of funding.” (Staff)

Some staff members noted that with more funds, they would do more marketing of the project, devote staff time to building community partnerships and seeking sponsorships for the project, conduct a public awareness poster campaign, among a host of other things.

In the summer of 2008, a ½ hour documentary about the project was filmed, and funds to be able to promote and make copies available of this film were also pinpointed as needed.

In April 2009, after this evaluation was complete, the Barbershop Project received a grant from the Toronto Community Foundation to be able to develop and implement their communications ideas. This Vital Ideas grant will allow them to:

1. Engage a specialist to develop communication materials and a strategy to convey the project's distinct and effective record to potential private and public sector supporters. This would be a marketing plan that would build sustainability for the project. The grant would also allow them to assess the possible use of posters (see below) as corporate sponsorship opportunities.
2. Involve community members in developing posters that communicate Black positive fathering messages; disseminate posters broadly.
3. Disseminate the project model using evaluation findings and documentary DVD at meetings, conferences, community media etc.

In addition to the need for funds to carry out more communications, several participants and barbers noted that they would like to see sessions offered more frequently.

"I recommend they come more often." (Participant)

Budgetary constraints have prohibited many ideas from being realized. Nevertheless, the project in its current state is meeting its intended outcomes (as discussed in the Outcomes sections of this report). Given that the target outcomes are being met, it may be necessary for the Advisory Committee to review the intended scope of the project and revise it to match the larger vision for the project that has emerged, and that has grown stronger in the last year.

Potential to Build the Barbershop Vision

Several project stakeholders see potential for building on the momentum of the project's success. One participant in particular noted that the Barbershop sessions could be considered as starting points, rather than ends in themselves.

"Barbershop is a good starting place, a target place where everyone is heading to... The barbershop is not a resource centre, it's a barbershop. People are here to have a haircut at the end of the day." (Participant)

Some have suggested that the project launch a website including an online discussion forum for fathers, or a weekly drop-in for black dads and their kids.

Not only are there ideas for building on the existing project; a larger vision has surfaced among many individuals involved to expand of the project to other areas of Toronto, as well as other communities in Canada and internationally.

"It's not a local issue. It could be an international project. You could take this project to USA, to Caribbean, fundamental problems – poverty, racism, the feelings of inadequacy, of how society looks at me as a black man." (Staff)

The idea of replicating the project in other communities has caught on among the main individuals running the project, and when they talk about it, there is a sense of urgency. They see a strong need to bring the project's success to other places where it could work to strengthen other communities. The desire to grow brings up many questions, such as;

- how would the program outreach to other communities?;
- what is unique to the context in the Eglinton-Oakwood community that would need to be considered when starting up a new location for the Barbershop Project?
- how would the decision about whether or not to expand be made, and by whom?

Balancing Ownership and Project Structure

Project stakeholders identified a tension between a need to foster community ownership and the tendency to take a more centralized coordination approach.

On the larger scale, major decisions about the project tend to be made by Macaulay. Macaulay is very committed to the future of the project. When the funder gave Macaulay a heads-up that the funding may be in jeopardy due to less available funds, Macaulay made concerted efforts to secure alternate funding.

Although other stakeholders on the evaluation committee appreciated these efforts very much, it was pointed out that they had not been made aware of the potential funding dilemma. It may have been possible, it was felt, for them to help in some way.

“The community wants transparency. If we are in a financial crunch right now, then we need to share it the community. This is key. If we ask the community for advice, they might have fundraising ideas.” (Staff)

Members of the community and staff have indicated the need to convene the Advisory Committee to hold serious discussions and make decisions about how to structure the project in a stronger way.

For day-to-day project operations, the project currently leans heavily on the talents and coordination skills of the Project Coordinator. The time required to complete all the tasks and the loose structure of the project puts pressure on that role. It was designed in this way to make sure that barbers and others would not feel pressured to take on more than they already have. However, now that the project is more established and tasks can be clearly defined, there is opportunity for stakeholders to step into more hands-on roles and take responsibility for various tasks (such as program promotion and outreach) that they have time and energy to do. In this way, the Project Coordinator would have a more manageable workload and she would have more time to plan and respond to emerging project needs. More importantly the sense of community ownership would be enhanced.

“We need to be more clear about our roles. Structure is definitely missing. I struggle with it... don't want it to be too rigid. Want people to feel comfortable.” (Staff)

It seems that the informal structure is indeed a strength of the project, and at the same time it has become the source of some challenges. More people sharing tasks may

mean more structure, so in implementing changes it would be important to keep the structure flexible.

Potential for Ongoing Engagement of More Fathers

Over the long term, the project could work toward engaging more dads on an ongoing basis, in more than one way. For example, participant retention is not a strong focus of the project. The project does not keep track of participant attendance in a formal way. Anecdotal evidence suggests that few dads are intentionally returning just for the barbershop sessions, although many happen to be present at multiple sessions because they go quite frequently.

“I do think that promotion...and continuous outreach, to say at each session to come back to the next session, same time, same place...the continuity will happen between the facilitators and the barbers...Of course to make a significant impact, you probably need to go to more than one session...but if one person comes to get a haircut and hears something that sticks with them...there are so many ways it could influence them in a positive way.” (Staff)

The issue of continuity does not appear to be a major concern to stakeholders, since the nature of the program is quite informal.

Another component of the program that leaves room for improvement is participant use of the resources available to them beyond the monthly sessions. The Project Coordinator and Parent Education Support Worker are always present at the sessions to provide participants with direct access to trained support individuals who can link them with direct resources. Most participants have not taken advantage of that opportunity. In a ten month period, the Project Coordinator had a total of four Barbershop Project participants come forward to ask for help, and the Parent Education Support Worker has also fielded very few questions.

According to project staff members, this is due in part because individuals have been hesitant to ask for help. Some of these individuals said they had been struggling with a problem for an extended period of time, but they had trouble admitting they needed help. The other factor influencing the lack of individuals seeking assistance is that the available support is not emphasized in the sessions.

“Facilitators don’t identify each time that there is a social worker. Barbers are better at referring.” (Staff)

Media Attention

A somewhat welcome challenge (and opportunity) presented itself when the project received a great deal of attention from mainstream media. Newspaper and television journalists have run several stories on the project, putting it in the public spotlight. This attention was of course welcome and positive for the public perception of the black community. At the same time, it was overwhelming for staff to keep up with the demand of managing calls and answering questions about the project.

“There was a lot of media attention before but not as much now...everybody wanted to come to the barbershop with their camera...this project changes the negative perception of black fathers.” (Staff)

An interesting point is that local black-focused newspapers have been less quick to carry stories about the project. Local radio programs that focus on black culture, on the other hand, have publicized the program quite a lot. Project staff have identified a need to outreach further to all local black media.

Recommendations

Recommendations that emerged from the data have been grouped in this section according to themes. These recommendations were agreed upon by the Evaluation Committee. They are meant for the Advisory Committee to consider and develop an action plan for ways to implement them.

Facilitation

- Provide additional training to facilitators so they have the appropriate skills to facilitate the groups. This will be especially important for larger barbershops where many small conversations are being held by customers.
- Consider debriefing after each session to share what went well, and what could be improved on for the next time.
“Would like the facilitators to try to get more people to talk, when some people haven’t talked yet.” (Participant)
- Explore the possibility of training barbers to co-facilitate with a facilitator. Barbers committed to the project may be interested in increasing their role.
“They are so committed, it’s important to them...some barbers are ready to facilitate” (Staff)
- Decide on topics several months ahead, while still maintaining flexibility to respond to emerging topics. Be proactive, and efficient to be able to research several areas at a time.
- Continue to use the free haircut vouchers strategically, by using them as incentives for answering difficult questions, or incentives for more youth involvement.

Resources

- Consider ways to diversify funding sources, such as sponsorship possibilities.
- Check assumptions about resources: Given that the project has many committed stakeholders and strengths, as well as limited financial resources, the project may need to be creative about how to use the resources in order to optimize the potential of the program. For example, create more volunteer opportunities. Another possibility could be that the Parent Education Support Worker and the Project Coordinator may not need to be present at each session.
- Have the topic of funding-related updates as an ongoing Advisory Committee agenda item.

Beyond the Barbershop

- Start conversations about ways that the project could be expanded or replicated in other communities, and begin to think about logistics of what it would entail.
- One participant suggested creating a community centre for the black community.

“We need to create a place where brothers and sisters could get together and meet and talk about things that are relevant in their lives... If I’m not part of the church, I can’t have that [information] available to me. Not everyone is going to be in the church and not everyone is going to the mosque.” (Participant)

Community Ownership

- Hold monthly Advisory Committee meetings on a regular basis.
- Broaden the Advisory Committee to include expertise in marketing, accounting, media, and technology as well as to include a participant and representation from an organization supporting the black community.
- Hold a discussion or series of discussions and make decisions about how to structure the terms of reference for the Advisory Committee so that it has more ownership and makes more decisions about implementation of the current project and possible expansion of the project. Possibly have a smaller Implementation sub-committee.
- Consider ways to strike a balance between community ownership and the need to run efficiently.
- Delegate tasks to different individuals or teams. For example, put together a special committee that will advise and act on community outreach to promote and share information about the project.
- Consider sharing the task of researching monthly topics. For example, having a specific research person or team to collect information using a web-based search engine, and academic articles. Research might be done by staff, students, or volunteers. The library could be more of a resource for this aspect of the project.

Outreach to Engage More Regular Participants

- Continue with current forms of outreach, and consider using technology to get the word out, such as group texting or group emailing, or utilizing the website more.

“Put more information on the website.” (Participant)

“Get the word out further into the Jane/Finch area.” (Participant)

“Try to reach out to the community more.” (Participant)

- One participant suggested to specifically outreach to new fathers.

“Have a team ready to help new fathers, especially young teenage fathers: “A young man coming to you looking for answers, you should have a protocol ready for him, answers for him.” (Participant)

- Create a volunteer role to outreach to more youth (who are potential future fathers).

Develop Culturally Relevant Resources

- Prioritize developing a large resource binder that includes all the well-researched resources, and a bibliography list of past session topics to use as a reference. This can be used for educational purposes with participants who are interested in learning more, and it can be used to repeat sessions with new participants. Summaries of each session that are already created by the Project Coordinator could potentially be a useful addition to the binder.
- Create many smaller binders, one on each main topic to be more accessible for people interested in a specific area.

- Consider creating a new in-depth DVD that could be shared as an educational resource for use by fathers

Media

- Outreach to black-focused media in order to run advertisements about the sessions.
- Strategize messages about the project to mainstream media to optimize how it might be useful to the project, for example to share a wish-list of what is needed.

Conclusion

The Barbershop Project is a truly innovative program and it has been identified as successful by all stakeholders involved. As the project moves forward, it will need to clarify its scope and the degree to which the community members involved can influence and take part in project operations.

The project inspires curiosity and respect in people from all walks of life, gender, and skin colour. This modest, small project sends a powerful message to the wider Toronto community that cannot help but challenge stereotypes about black fathers.

Far beyond this positive influence of the project on the mainstream perception of black dads, the project is having a concrete positive influence in the black community. They are building on strengths with this program, and participants and barbers are holding their heads higher because of it.

In reflecting on the essence of a black father's experience of the Barbershop Sessions, the words of one facilitator capture it best:

*“What we're doing is building a foundation from which to build on. I don't even think of it as working or giving back. I'm with my people. Why I think this is so important is we are **grounding**. It is so powerful in the most spiritual, most profound sense.”*
(Barbershop Facilitator)

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