

City Kidz: Partners to End Child Poverty

Country: Hamilton, Ontario, Canada



Millennium Development Goals:

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Duration: October 2006 to September 2009

Beneficiaries: 200 children aged five to 11

Partners: City Kidz, City of Hamilton

Total project funding: CDN\$217,623

Funding source: Private donations

Project goal: Children have a strong foundation of hope for their future

What we are trying to accomplish:

1. Help children develop positive self-worth
2. Help children experience more meaningful, successful experiences
3. Help children develop positive core values and faith
4. Develop plans and approaches to replicate the program in other Canadian cities

Project Overview

While known primarily for responding to needs in the developing world, World Vision has been working with children in Canada since the early 1970s. In 2005, World Vision Canada launched Partners to End Child Poverty to improve the effectiveness of services currently provided by local organizations in Canada and to share our knowledge and resources on a national scale.

Today in Canada, about 1.2 million children live in poverty. Through Partners to End Child Poverty, World Vision is focusing on the needs of children in urban, low-income neighbourhoods, especially in aboriginal communities, new Canadian families and female-led households.

Our three strategic objectives include building capacity in local community-based organizations, funding innovative transformational approaches to fight child poverty and replicating the best models and practices across Canada.

City Kidz offers guidance and hope in Hamilton

One of the 74 Canadian agencies World Vision has partnered with is City Kidz, a faith-based organization that serves children in Hamilton's north end. In these low-income neighbourhoods adjacent to the city's steel mills, many recent immigrants and single-parent families settle in rooming houses and rented homes. Very few parks or after-school programs are available in the area, and children become vulnerable to bullying, drug use and gang violence.

Launched in 1993 by Rev. Todd Bender, City Kidz provides a 90-minute program of puppets, skits, stories and songs each Saturday for an audience of over 900 children, ages three through eleven. The fast-paced, high-energy program teaches Christian values and helps children know they are loved, equips them to make wise choices and builds a sense of hope for the future.

Several large red buses provide free transportation for all of the children who attend. Each week, more than 1,500 children and their families receive a visit from a volunteer to

provide encouragement and offer other practical assistance to the family. The program helps build resiliency in children, providing new experiences which they would otherwise not have. Through these experiences and positive relationships, children are able to see that they can overcome their current circumstances and not remain in poverty.

Partnership with World Vision strengthens local organizations

City Kidz already had a well-established and respected program when they partnered with World Vision in 2006.

"We were looking at strengthening our existing program within our existing service area and building a stronger base," says Todd. "During the early planning, we realized that there was an opportunity to expand our horizons."

That opportunity emerged during the workshops offered to cooperate with agencies through the Partners to End Child Poverty program. In these sessions, participants learned how to use a modified version of LEAP (Learning through Evaluation with Accountability and Planning), the project framework World

Vision uses in its Area Development Programs (ADPs) in developing countries. The Canadian agencies were able to benefit from World Vision's development experience around the world.

In the first two-day workshop, Todd and the City Kidz leadership learned how to conduct a community needs assessment. Using proven tools provided by World Vision, they learned to identify significant gaps in services to children in Ward 2, a very low-income neighbourhood just east of where they were already working. They discovered that children had limited opportunity for educational and recreational experiences outside of school, and participation fees for the existing programs presented a barrier to low-income families.

During the needs evaluation process, City Kidz staff members met with key community stakeholders who had helped

to strengthen their existing work and open possibilities for expanded impact in Hamilton.

"With the awareness we have created in the community," says Todd, "and the support we have received, we have a foundation on which we will build our expansion."

As a result of the assessment, City Kidz made a decision to expand their program and begin reaching out to children in the east part of Ward 2.

After documenting the need, Todd and his leadership team participated in a second two-day workshop, where they learned how to effectively design the project, which included developing processes for ongoing evaluation and reporting. In addition to the opportunity to impact more children, the project planning has helped City Kidz focus on their core contributions.

Todd says, "it has become more evident that it will be essential for us to seek out formal collaborations and work hard at sharing resources across the community."

Managing growth and success

World Vision funded City Kidz's proposal and provided support for the Saturday morning events and the expansion of their free bus service—identified by the community as an important feature of the program. Since then, City Kidz has experienced dramatic growth. The average attendance on Saturday morning has grown from 450 to over 900 children. Now more than 800 volunteers are working with over 1,500 children, up from 850 two years ago—and almost 300 of the children are from the new project area in Ward 2. In September 2007, a preschool program called Kinder Kidz was launched

City Kidz founder Rev. Todd Bender rides the big red bus with Hamilton children and volunteers.



and now three Saturday sessions are filled with excited children aged three to five.

The rapid growth that followed the partnership has been the greatest challenge for City Kidz. The increasing number of children, bus routes and volunteers to manage has strained the informal organizational structures that had worked well in the past. World Vision has continued to work with City Kidz to help them implement the policies and structures they need to support and sustain a growing organization. The agency's leadership is learning to decentralize the decision-making process and build a strong team based on the same passion but with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Reaching children and fulfilling dreams

From the beginning, Todd Bender's vision for City Kidz was bigger than Hamilton. He wanted to see every child in Canada have the opportunity to follow their dreams and achieve their God-given

Over 900 children enjoy the high-energy program conducted by City Kidz every Saturday.



potential. The partnership with World Vision has given City Kidz the tools they need to begin making that dream a reality. Not only have they put them to work in Hamilton, they are now passing on what they have learned to other organizations as well.

“One of our overall goals has been to replicate our program,” explains Todd. “In 2008, we were able to formalize a partnership with a group that is providing a City Kidz-type program in Welland, Ontario.”

Through Partners to End Child Poverty, World Vision is helping

local agencies grow in their ability to help children overcome poverty. Our partnership has helped City Kidz to develop a model, which has been tested and expanded in Hamilton, and successfully transplanted just down the highway in Welland. Soon their vision will find a new expression in Saskatchewan, where City Kidz is actively working with community and faith-based organizations in Regina to launch a program in that city. Our hope is that hundreds of other Canadian children there will also find the help they need to break the cycle of poverty.

Results to date:

1. The Saturday program and weekly home visit program expanded to accommodate 200 more children. The new Kinder Kidz program was established for children from three to five years of age.
2. Partnership was forged with a similar program for children in Welland, Ontario and plans are underway to expand into Regina, Saskatchewan.
3. City Kidz's leadership staff were trained to do community and program assessments, design and planning, enabling them to identify gaps in programming and work with community partners to address them.
4. Through major fundraising initiatives, community awareness of City Kidz has grown along with an increase in donations.
5. Based on a survey of children participating in the program, 73 per cent of the children had a positive measure of self-worth; 83 per cent of children attending City Kidz for three years or more reported a positive sense of self-worth; 77 per cent of children looked forward to the weekly visit from their City Kidz volunteer; 82 per cent of the children were excited about the program.

What we learned from this project:

- Frequent surveys of client families and children to measure program effectiveness, along with surveys and data gathering for other programs, interfered with the quality of home visits. Because of this finding, City Kidz has restricted scheduled surveys to four times a year.
- It is often more effective to empower staff and volunteers to make decisions rather than centralizing decision-making with the organization's leaders. This helps to build a strong team based on the same passion but with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Transportation and finances are the two biggest barriers for poor families to participate in community activities. City Kidz provides door-to-door transportation to programs at no cost to the families. This will continue to be an important aspect of the program.