



BC Association of Family Resource Programs

**Effectiveness and Long-Term Impacts
of the Work of
Family Resource Programs in Society**

**Supporting the Work of Family Resource Programs with
Scientific Evidence for
FRP-BC Members and FRP Practitioners**

2018 Consultation Report

Summary

**Prepared by:
Diego Arias**

**Assisted by:
Sherry Sinclair**

20766 80th Avenue,
Langley, BC, V2Y 1X6
+1 778-590-0045
info@frpbc.ca
www.frpbc.ca

Effectiveness and Long-Term Impacts of the work of Family Resource Programs in Society

EFFECTIVENESS

FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS

Are relationship-based low-intensity support for families. Programs provide parents the time they need to engage in program activities. Engagement facilitates the parent-practitioner relationship.

RELATIONSHIP-BASED AND FAMILY-CENTRED

Relationships are essential in enhancing family **resilience**. Programs are holistic and encompass more than early childhood development.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE THE FAMILY INSTEAD OF FOCUSING ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS ALONE?

this comes down to the social nature of all human beings. Social skills are the core to the child's future success. From prenatal to age five, attachment shapes self-regulation and more.

AREN'T ATTACHMENT AND SELF-REGULATION SOMETHING PARENTS DO NATURALLY?

This depends on the childhood of the parents and their living environment. Different situations such as intergenerational trauma and stress may affect the bonding process and the parent-child relationship.

WHY ARE ATTACHMENT AND SELF-REGULATION IMPORTANT TO CHILD SUCCESS?

Healthy attachment between parent and child nurture healthy self-regulation in the child. The more self-regulated a child is, the more he or she will contribute to society as adult. Five-year-olds with low self-regulation skills are more likely to represent high economic costs to the welfare and judicial systems as adults.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Parents with a history of high adverse childhood experiences may find their parenting skills unsettled.

STRESS

Isolation, depression and violence at home and more, can trigger stress in parents. Stress affects how parents treat their children and their relationship.

IN WHAT WAYS IS PARENT ENGAGEMENT CENTRAL TO FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS?

Engagement and relationships are key to parents:

- Learning to deal with difficulty
- Appreciating and sharing the good/success times
- Gaining sense of belonging by engaging with their community,
- Strengthening child and family outcomes.

FUNCTION AS A NORMALIZING CONTEXT

Families with low and high situations of difficulty enjoy the same calming effect of a non-judgement environment offered at family resource programs.



PREVENTION OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Parenting is a journey, not a situation or skill. Parents and caregivers are motivated to participate in the family resource program because they have a family and not because they have a problem to solve.



TIME

Practitioners offer parents the time they need to develop trust to engage in conversation about family situations.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Relationships of trust between practitioner and parents are the groundwork that enables staff to respond effectively and provide instrumental help to parents.



FOLLOW-UP & RESOLUTION

Practitioners are able to check in with parents about previously discussed sensitive situations and arrive at a solution.



HOW DO PRACTITIONERS STRENGTHEN CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES?

Practitioners consider three points: time, relationship-building, and follow-up and resolution. Intentional prevention practices offer parents the opportunity to learn how to view their own skills and to mobilize resources to deal with challenges. Families are provided opportunities to connect with their community.

ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS MAKE FAMILIES STRONGER

Engagement and relationships are capacity builders in many ways. They contribute to a sense of belonging. Positive parenting skills, healthy attachment and self-regulation in children. Practitioners at programs play a strategic role in prevention and family empowerment.

LONG-TERM IMPACTS IN SOCIETY

HEALTH

- Obesity prevention
- Depression and Anxiety
- Substance use
- Suicide

JUSTICE

- Criminal behaviour
- Violence against women
- Violence against Indigenous people

RESILIENCE

- Inclusion
- Reduction of Inequalities
- Enhancement of social mobility

We acknowledge we are on the unceded traditional territory of the Kwantlen, Katzi and Matsqui Peoples



Summary

Family resource programs (FRPs) are direct-service programs providing families with children under 6 years old the opportunity to attend programs on a drop-in basis. The family resource program approach requires the engagement of the parents in the activities. FRP-BC member programs and practitioners understand this empowerment model.

We see the efforts of FRP-BC and member programs to find evidence that supports the effectiveness of the family-centred approach in community-based settings. These efforts are concentrated in convincing governments and individuals unfamiliar with the field, that FRPs play an important role in answering many social challenges. Less material is directed to members programs and practitioners that clearly consolidates the definitions, purpose and long-term impacts of the work of FRPs. Here are a few salient issues we have noticed.

- Members and practitioners want to articulate the unique features of both family-centred and child-centred programs.
- Some practitioners are aware of the far-reaching impacts of their work in the health of families and child development in the short and long term. Some practitioners are learning to see FRPs through this lens.
- FRP-BC members seek funding to support their programs. A compelling grant application requires evidence to demonstrate to funders how their programs are a good investment. Members express the desire to secure clearly linked scientific evidence with family-centred programs.
- Research and reports on family-centered programs can be hard to find. They may have unclear titles or may not succinctly relay the content of the document to the reader.

Defining Effectiveness and Long-Term Impacts

There is no doubt all member programs and practitioners know how valuable their work is to society. As a former participating parent, volunteer or practitioner, you have first-hand experience of the effectiveness of family resource programs. However, when speaking to anyone familiar with the field you may find it a challenge to explain the effectiveness or the long-term impacts of your program in just a few words.

To connect the effectiveness of the work of family resource programs with its long-term impacts on society, it helps to understand **what** the work is you do and **how** you do the work. Understanding your work well makes it easier to assure a parent or a funder how your program is effective and is worthy of joining or funding. We suggest you can explain the effectiveness of your program through the **what** and the **how**, and the long-term **impacts** of your program to society by establishing a connection between the **what** and the **how** with **scientific evidence**.

Why?

Defining the effectiveness and long-term impacts of family resource programs is important because science proves the model works. Family programs emerged to support parents with challenges related to child rearing and changes in parents' lifestyle before the scientific evidence discovered the impact of the well-being of the family in relation to the socioemotional and cognitive development of children. The previous belief and practice to child success was centred on cognitive development through early education in classroom settings with teachers, without parents present.

The evolution of scientific evidence now reports the health of the family as central to the socioemotional development of children, out of which the health of cognitive development grows. We bring research evidence to back up the effectiveness of family resource programs and the long-term impacts of family intervention during early childhood in the socioeconomic and emotional well-being of individuals and communities.

Effectiveness

To explain the effectiveness of your program to any stakeholder, it helps to have a rationale that says plainly what your programs are, how your programs work and what the impacts are for families and society.

Engagement and Relationships: Remind yourself that engagement and relationships are the heart of the work of family resource programs. Scientific evidence supports family resource programs:

Low-intensity support is offered to parents over a length of time and matches the parent's openness.

- deliver low-intensity support
- intentionally provide the time for parents to participate and volunteer in program activities and to
- create relationships among practitioners, other parents and the community.

Contrast Between Relationship-Based Family-Centred Practices and Child-Centred Practices: FRPs are holistic. Programs come around the whole family with the intention to build relationships that empower parents. As a practitioner, you provide high-quality service reflected in your ability to be curious and anticipate the needs of the participants. Child development is framed within the context of the family. Family-centred programs focus on the efficacy of the adult, the family and the child. Efficacy is believing you are able.

The focus of a child-centred program is on the child, within the context of the program or school. Their activities and environment are based on the enhancement and promotion of healthy child development.

Remember that family-centred programs prepare children for social life, and child-centred practices prepare children for school. FRPs ensure attachment and self-regulation have healthy development during the sensitive period, from age prenatal to 5 years old. Even so, both child-centred and family-centred programs are very important, and parents should have access to both. Some parents may or may not have the time to participate in an FRP or may prefer a child-centred approach. Each family has their own preferences and goals.

Why are attachment and self-regulation important to child success?

Healthy attachment between parent and child nurtures healthy self-regulation in children. The more self-regulated a child is, the more likely he or she will contribute to society as an adult. The research available on attachment and self-regulation indicates that a five-year-old with low self-regulation skills are more likely to represent high economic costs to the welfare and judicial systems as an adult. As a practitioner, please note when you facilitate the interaction between parents and children in ways that promote parent-child attachment, the child's self-regulation increases.

Aren't attachment and self-regulation something parents do naturally?

This depends on the childhood of the parents and their living environment. Different situations such as **intergenerational trauma** and **toxic stress** related to isolation, limited parenting skills, depression, violence at home and more may affect the bonding process and the parent-child relationship. The relationship between parent and child during the child's first 5 years of life has life-long effects for the child.

In what ways is parent engagement central to family resource programs?

As a practitioner, you know that family resource programs revolve around relationships and conversations. Engagement and relationships are key to parents:

- When learning to deal with difficulty
- Showing appreciation and facilitating sharing of good and successful times
- Gaining a sense of belonging by engaging with their community
- Strengthening child and family outcomes

As a practitioner, how am I doing all this?

You normalize family life within the context of the FRP

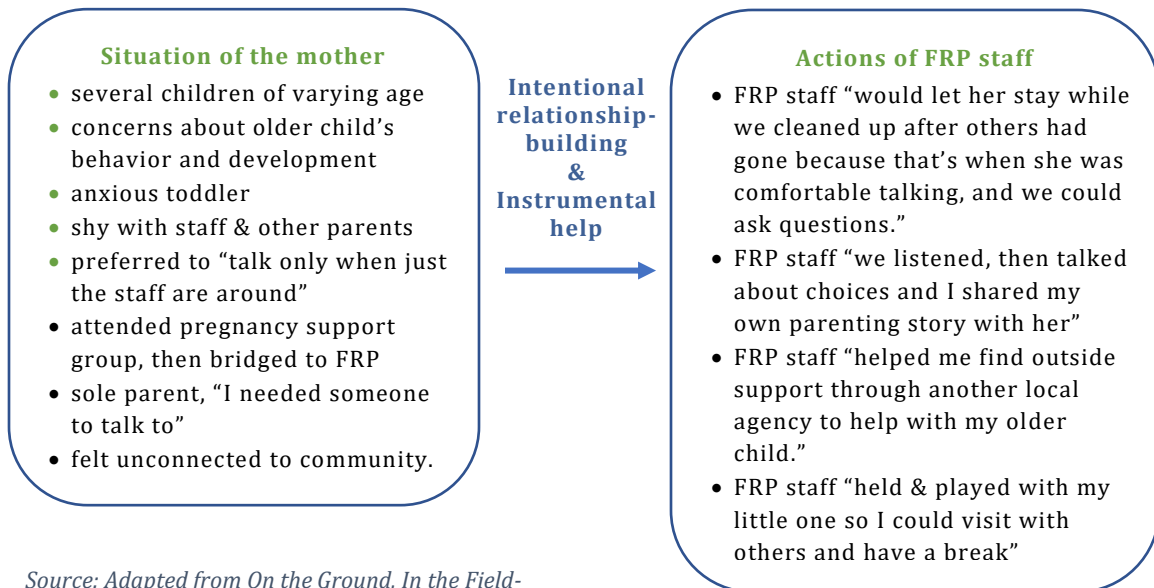
You help to prevent adverse childhood experiences

Engagement and relationships make families stronger. These contribute to a sense of belonging, parenting skills, healthy attachment and self-regulation in children. As a practitioner you play a strategic role in the prevention of poor child and family outcomes and family empowerment. What parents learn at your family resource program develops into healthy outcomes for the whole family.

How do practitioners strengthen child and family outcomes? Your training and experience provide with **the intentional prevention practices** you use in your daily interactions with parents. These practices offer parents the opportunity to learn how to mobilize resources and deal with challenges. Families are provided with connections to their community. As an FRP practitioner, you consider three points to empower families: time, relationship-building and follow-up and resolution.

- **Time:** You allow parents the time they need to trust you to engage in conversation about family situations.
- **Relationship-building:** Relationships of trust between you and parents are the groundwork that gives you the opportunity to respond effectively and provide instrumental help to parents.
- **Follow up and resolution:** You have a great memory. You are able to check in with parents about previously discussed sensitive situations and companion parents as they navigate and arrive at their solution. You are aware that family problems are life paced and that situations may take from days to weeks to months to be resolved.

The situation of a mother as described by staff



Source: Adapted from On the Ground, In the Field- Applied Promising Practices (2013, p. 33)

Long-Term Impacts in Society

➤ Health

➤ Justice

➤ Resilience

Now that the **what** and the **how** are clear, let's talk about the scientific evidence available supporting the positive long-term impacts of family resource programs. We covered the **what** and the **how** because this is what influences the long-term impacts. For example, you can say research indicates that adverse childhood experiences are connected to criminal behaviour in teenagers and that research also indicates that FRPs prevent antisocial behaviour by reducing adverse childhood experiences. However, a curious parent or an inquisitive funder may want to know **what** you do and **how** you do it. It is of great value to you as a member or practitioner when you can identify the fine details of your daily work that are making all the difference. Additionally, you may feel drawn to enhance particular practices or to notice parents or children who may need more support.

We capitalize on four reports to bring together data on family resource programs, endorsing international legal order, policy recommendations by authorities in the field of development, and testimonies of parents. We have grouped the evidence into three areas: Health, Justice and Resilience.

Family Resource Programs and Sustainable Development in BC (Arias & Sinclair, 2018): This report is important because it addresses the notion of sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations in 2015. As a signing party to the UN's 2030 Agenda, Canada has the responsibility to adopt and implement the SDGs.

Monitoring Family Resource Programs in British Columbia (Malange, Sinclair, & Khazaie, 2016): This monitoring report provides the data of the services of family resource programs used in the sustainable development report mentioned above.

On the Ground, In the Field. Applied Promising Practices (Charlesworth et al., 2013): The emotional and human components are crucial. This report covers the impact family resource programs practices have on families and includes parents' quotes and testimonies.

Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families (Center on the Developing Child, 2017): The Harvard Center on the Developing Child is an authority in child development policy and practice. This report is important because it provides policy recommendations to governments. The three principles are responsive relationships, support core life skills and reduce sources of stress. These three principles and their recommendations are inherent to family resource programs.

Health

Obesity Prevention



SDG 2: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 on *Zero Hunger*. FRPs in BC contribute to the implementation of this goal with the provision of community kitchens and nutrition education with short and long-term impacts.

33% of family resource programs members of FRP-BC offer community kitchens and dinner activities. 47% of program members provide nutrition education.

Staff facilitates access to food (i.e. going to the food bank) when families go through life challenges such as a death in the family.

Policy for reducing the source of stress: Persistent stress causes the release of toxic stress hormones. These hormones can affect brain development and relationship building in children and parent. Experts recommend policies designed to reduce barriers to access basic support such as nutritious food (Center on the Developing Child, 2017).

Depression and Anxiety



SDG 3: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 on *Improving family health and well-being*. Family resource programs have a holistic support system in place to prevent depression in the life of children by supporting parent-child attachment, prenatal education, and adverse childhood experiences.

Evidence on adverse childhood experiences: Depression or any stressful circumstance affects healthy attachment in the first years of life.

- Healthy attachment is correlated with good mental health in adulthood (Bowlby, 1960).
- Family programs offer support to parents and facilitate healthy bonding between child and parent. Alcoholism is a trait that is explained by 60% of genetic expression. Alcohol stimulates anxiety calming mechanisms in the brain motivating individuals to drink (McGue, 1999).
- Even if parents struggle with alcoholism, healthy environmental conditions can trade this genetic predisposition in the children for an alcoholism-free life. Parental support in prenatal and early childhood can trade genetic predisposition to alcoholism and the child can become healthy adults (Blaze, Asok, & Roth, 2015).
- FRPs offer prenatal prepartum and post-partum counselling resources. Research also indicates that domestic violence, an adverse childhood experience, predisposes children to depression (Day, 1992). Staff at family resource programs build relationships with parents offering an opportunity for parents to trust and talk about violence at home with practitioners.

-
- The relationships practitioners offer to parents is a potent motivator for the reduction of violence at home (Arias & Sinclair, 2018, p. 20).

Practices that promote attachment at FRPs: There is evidence indicating that FRPs promote specific practices to improve attachment. For example, an analysis of 26 checklists of family-centred programs concludes that practices promoted by practitioners at family-centred programs are the most effective for the promotion of improved child development and child-parent relationship. These practices include helping the parents gain awareness of their child’s behavioural, emotional and social cues. Note, these are the **what** and the **how** previously discussed. These capacity-building and competence-enhancing practices are core to family-centred programs.

Data: 28% of the programs offer postpartum depression support; 16% of member programs provide prenatal guidance to parents. 9% of the programs offer settlement support to parents helping them deal with their isolation problems; 6 of every 10 programs have helped families resolve conflicts and roughly 2 in 10 (16%) staff members have assisted parents with drugs and alcohol challenges. (Malange et al., 2016).

Substance use

Practitioners understand moving to a new country is a stressful experience. Immigration is a stressful situation that can have negative effects on children. In BC, high-school students who came to Canada as immigrants are 47% more likely to consume marijuana compared to 12% of their Canadian-born peers. Those who immigrated when they were young report smoking more often than Canadian-born students. Research indicates that family resource programs help new immigrant families overcome isolation and depression.

The Trauma Informed Practitioner

Practices involved in recognizing, understanding and responding to the effects of a trauma. An FRP practitioner does not ask, “What’s wrong with you?” Instead, we ask, “What’s happened to you?”

Suicide

Adverse childhood experiences have life-long lasting effects. Researchers found that adverse childhood experiences increase the probabilities of attempt suicide in adults 2 to 5 times. Additional studies indicate that comprehensive suicide prevention should start with childhood and family well-being to prevent adversity in childhood.

Policy for supportive responsive relationships: providing support to parents is a long-term positive socioeconomic benefit. The work of practitioners and FRPs is emulated by the **#longgame**, as FRPs consider the future implications of current choices, think ahead and are deliberate and patient.

The Center on the Developing Child recommends “the provision of sufficient flexibility in benefits to avoid the disruption of critical relationships with caregivers that happens when children cycle in and out of programs due to loss of a child care subsidy, housing instability, or involvement in the child welfare system. Establish policies that strengthen family relationships whenever possible; for example, promote frequent contact between children in out-of-home care and their parents and reduce the change of placement in children in foster care. Offer services through trusted organizations and individuals in the community that have already built strong relationships with community members”.

#longgame

Refers to a long-term strategy or endeavour. FRPs are long-game players in the life of families. From prenatal to housing issues, FRPs understand being a parent occurs in a complex system by adapting to the system. For example, sometimes parents are unable to attend a registered program. FRPs removed the formality of attendance by adopting the drop-in model which welcomes parents with their children whenever they can drop by.

Justice

Criminal Behaviour

Self-regulation in children between age 3 to 5 is a strong predictor of criminal behaviour. As a practitioner, you want to emphasize the fact that providing support to parents to orient them in the role of parenting may outweigh the role of not-so-positive genetic traits. A positive nurturing early childhood is a stronger determinant of adult outcome than genetic predispositions.

As a practitioner or member, you recognize many activities offered by FRPs target self-regulation in children. 90% of the programs include self-regulation activities. Staff in 70% of the agencies have helped parents with child's discipline issues.

You are also mindful of the importance of consistency in building responsive and human-paced relationships. Providing consistency to parents and children is equally important.

Violence Against Women

FRPs are places where male and female caregivers of different cultural backgrounds meet. This informal and inclusive setting lends itself to the promotion of love and gender equality across the spectrum. The openness to male and female participants may help to break gender biases and discrimination that could exist in people.

The active engagement of family-centred members with the community has led to offering programs in other languages. These programs can become a safe place for immigrant women with limited English language knowledge who may be subject to abuse of violence at home.

Violence Against Indigenous People

FRP staff are motivated to empower Indigenous people and to bring awareness about their reality among non-Indigenous participants. Practitioners and members want to be an example of inclusion to non-Indigenous and Indigenous children to stop the perpetuation of abuse.

FRPs are a safe place for Indigenous families as well. Indigenous participants represent 8.7 % of the total member participants. This number is important because Indigenous people in BC represent 5.4% of the population.

To tackle racism and discrimination against Indigenous people we support the current Indigenous generations to empower themselves with agency and self-efficacy. Furthermore, as a practitioner, it helps to offer the opportunities to both Indigenous and non-indigenous children, seeing the value in themselves as they develop a strong agency and learn about inclusion.

Resilience

Families are the heart of communities and supporting families in their own resiliency in turn creates resilient communities. In addition to the well-being benefits within justice by crime prevention and crime reduction, FRPs make communities sustainable by facilitating inclusive access to services for all families.

Inclusion

FRPs practices include welcoming families of various minorities, i.e. sexual orientation or cultural background, assisting parents with parenting skills, access to early education programs for all children, the participation of parents in program design, and motivating partnership among stakeholders.

Partnership is essential in making communities stronger. Families who have a strong social network support are unlikely to be exposed to situations of economic hardship. Families who do not feel they belong to their community may step into unhealthy emotional states, affecting their interactions with their children.

Are there vulnerable families or resilient families?

We find what we look for. Every family face challenges. Resilience happens when families bounce back or recover from difficulty. The more challenges overcome, the more resiliency is shown.

- **Data on inclusion:** 90% of the FRPs promote the development of social networks among parents. (Malange et al., 2016). Research shows that parents develop feelings of community belonging when they are engaged in participatory decision making at FRPs (Charlesworth et al., 2013).

Reduction of Inequalities and Enhancement of Socioeconomic Mobility



SDGs 1, 10 & 11: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1, 10 & 11 on *No Poverty, Reduced Inequalities, Sustainable Cities and Communities*. FRPs help to the implementation of Goals 1, 10 and 11 with actions that

improve Society. Reduction of family socioeconomic hardship and the provision of equal opportunities to children (i.e. nutrition and parenting skills) at early ages contribute to the reduction of inequalities and economic success of the growing child. FRPs' efforts encompass assistance to parents with economic difficulties in more than one way and ensure children benefit from the same parental skills providing orientation to parents in the upbringing of their children (Arias & Sinclair, 2018).

Evidence on inequalities and socioeconomic success: The socioeconomic well-being of an individual is correlated to their childhood.

- Socioeconomic difficulty may cause adversity in childhood. Research indicates that the stress related to economic hardship is linked to hostile responses of parents toward their children (Shaefer, Lapidos, Wilson, & Danziger, 2018).
- Appropriate self-regulation in children under 6 years of age is a predictor of professional success (Fergusson et al., 2013; Moffitt et al., 2011).
- Families encounter adversity as an element of life. Children grow up to be resilient adults when their families possess the skills to teach them how to cope with adversity (Sege & Harper Browne, 2017).

Data on socioeconomic success: The statistics here correspond to the direct services FRPs deliver. These efforts reduce inequality and encourage socioeconomic success in children.

- 14% of FRPs provide information related to employment.
- 50% of the programs provide concrete support to families who require help meeting their basic needs.
- 75% of FRPs include activities for the enhancement of family resilience.
- 90% of the FRPs focus on self-regulation in children. The activities of 95% of the programs help parents build stronger parenting skills.
- 50% of the FRPs offer early literacy activities (Malange et al., 2016).

Policy for core life skills: Childhood is the main determinant of socioeconomic differences among individuals. In order to offer the same opportunities for socioeconomic success to everyone (especially children of vulnerable families), parents need appropriate parental skills to provide their children with core life skills to thrive in life. The Center on the Developing Child encourages policies for two generations programs so that children and parents have the opportunity to develop life skills. The Center highlights the importance of brain development and self-regulation. Children can develop these skills with consistent parenting even when adversity at home persists. In practice, programs should provide regular opportunities for parents and children to learn these skills (Center on the Developing Child, 2017, p. 5). The importance of this point is that the suggested practice aligns with the way FRP staff facilitate the programs.

Conclusion

We designed this consultation to help practitioners and members to distinguish family-centred practices from other practices and to illustrate what, how and why family resource programs do their work. We explained the efforts of community-based intervention work by breaking down the practices of FRPs and describing how they are achieved. Scientific findings are provided to illustrate their efficacy. We discussed the long-term impacts of FRPs in society to reveal their effectiveness in attaining the sustainable societies we need. Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda is also covered.

All in all, we hope this report shines a light for practitioners and members in the family resource support work you do, how you do it and why it matters.

An annual or biannual publication of a consulting report with new scientific finding for the use of practitioners and members is recommended.

Find full article on:

<http://frpbc.ca/media/uploads/files/Effectiveness and Long-term Impacts of the Work of Family Resource Programs Consultation Full Report 2018 1.pdf>

© BC Association of Family Resource Programs, October 2018

Authors: Diego Arias, assisted by Sherry Sinclair