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Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

30th Annual Spring Research Symposium

As the Centre on Aging celebrates its 30th year at the University of Manitoba, it will also host its 30th Annual Dialogue on Aging.

May 6 8:45 am - 4:00 pm

Frederic Gaspard Theatre Theatres B and C Brodie Centre Bannatyne Campus

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

For more details go to: umanitoba.ca/centres/aging/events/

Visionary Conversations

Our Education System: The Good, The Bad and The Solutions

Engage with our experts as they share their perspectives on our education system and the research that shows why things must change.

May 22

Robert B. Schultz Theatre St. John's College, Fort Garry Campus

Reception in Galleria 6:30 - 7 pm Panel discussion 7 - 8:30 pm

Featured speakers:

Jocelyn Fournier-Gawryluk (Alumna) -President, Canadian Association of Principals

Marni Brownell - Associate Professor. Community Health Sciences/Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, Faculty of Medicine

Marlene Atleo - Associate Professor, **Educational Administration, Foundations** and Psychology, Faculty of Education

Rodney Clifton - Senior Scholar and Retired Fellow, St John's College; Senior Fellow, Frontier Centre for Public Policy

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Turning data into more high school diplomas

Researcher's analysis guides policymakers to improve education system



The U of M's Marni Brownell, associate professor in community health sciences, is among the featured speakers at the upcoming Visionary Conversations Our Education System: The Good, The Bad, And The Solutions.

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS For The Bulletin

The good news? More Manitoba teens are graduating from high school. The bad news? This isn't the case among young people living here in poverty, says Marni Brownell, lead investigator of a U of M study that looked at a decade worth of data about Manitoba's youth.

"Although we have this trend of improvement throughout the province... those improvements aren't being felt by all kids," says Brownell, a senior research scientist with the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) and associate professor in the department of community health sciences.

From 2000 to 2010, the number of young Manitobans who finished high school rose from 76 to 82 per cent. But as Brownell and her team looked more closely at potential risk factors that can push kids off course, the numbers grew dismal.

Among youth involved with the child welfare agency Child and Family Services, only 57 per cent received their diploma. For kids whose family had also received income assistance and whose mothers had become parents as teenagers, that number dropped considerably, to 16 per cent.

"It's their life circumstances that are contributing to poor outcomes. Maybe some don't want to go to university but possibly some do and just don't have the opportunities," Brownell says. "I see that as lost potential, individually and also for our society. Any kid contributes to the future of society. If they're not getting all of the opportunities that everybody else gets, it costs them and it costs society as well."

Brownell uses MCHP databases which

hold anonymous information about our education, health, social economic status and how we use social services. "We have one of the best, if not the best repositories of data in Canada and one of the best in the world," Brownell says.

But it's the faces behind the figures that motivate her, along with the potential to create change. Policymakers take notice of Brownell's results.

When she and her team first started exploring the education database and realized—in 2004—just how big a role a child's socio economic situation plays in their success in the classroom, a program dubbed Community School Investigators (named after the popular TV series CSI) was launched, bringing education to inner-city kids during the summer months.

"It feels wonderful that we can contribute to that," she says. "Anything we can do to contribute to kids achieving their full potential is such a bonus for us."

Brownell and her fellow MCHP researchers are now analyzing 14 existing programs aimed at reducing the risks—like full-day kindergarten and prenatal classes for low-income expectant moms. They want to know what is working best.

Already, they're certain it's important to reach kids early. Brownell's research shows children living in poverty start school less prepared, and most often kids who begin behind stay behind.

She's also further investigating the success in school of children living in foster care. Brownell was recently part of an international study involving six countries that looked at indicators of

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child maltreatment and realized Canada's "startlingly high rate" of kids in care.

In a single day (in 2007) more than 65,000 kids were in care in Canada. Between 9,000 and 10,000 of those children are in Manitoba. "Those are some of the highest rates in the world," Brownell notes.

Few scientific studies have been done addressing the best way to protect children at risk of abuse. Some countries—like Sweden take what Brownell calls "a family welfare approach." This model treats and supports all members of a family, reducing the risk rather than removing the child.

One quarter of Manitoban children are Aboriginal yet they make up nearly 90 per cent of children in care. This discrepancy suggests Aboriginal families facing childrearing challenges are being treated differently than non-Aboriginal families, Brownell says.

"In 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada stood up in the House of Commons and apologized on behalf of all Canadians for taking Aboriginal children away from their homes, away from their families and placing them into residential schools and there was a recognition that doing that, that tearing these kids away from their communities, away from their families, had lasting impact and damage," she says.

"I guess the question is raised now, with the way we treat Aboriginal kids in the foster care system, 20 years from now are we going to be apologizing again?"

Join Brownell and the other expert panelists for their perspective on Our Education System: The Good, The Bad and The Solutions (see details to left).

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