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
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
Janet Dyer – 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

umanitoba.ca/visionaryconversations

Turning data into more high school diplomas
Researchers’ analysis guides policymakers to improve education system

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.

"It’s startlingly high rate" of kids 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 on left).