

THE F&ST EXPERIENCE: A NARRATIVE STUDY

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research, framed as a narrative inquiry, was to explore the experiences of a select family's participation in the Family and Schools Together (F&ST) program at an elementary school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. All members of this select family were Caucasian and of non-aboriginal descent. These participating family members, a mother, father and their three boys, told their story within the context of guided questions in the setting of individual unstructured interviews. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed, analyzed for unique and common threads and written into the form of a family narrative.

Although unique threads were discovered from the analysis, the following common experiences emerged: the importance of taking time for family, the benefit of connecting with others and building relationships, the perception of the goals behind F&ST and favourite activities. These experiences were incorporated into the family narrative.

This study offers the opportunity for a greater awareness into the impact, participation in the F&ST (Family and Schools Together) intervention program has had on one select family and how that impact can be used to strengthen the delivery of that program and encourage others to get involved. Findings from this study show that the select family in this study experienced positive growth in family relationships, and positive affiliation with their school and community as a result of participating in F&ST. The findings from this study form the basis for implications for practice as well as for areas of further research.

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to all of the families who have participated and will participate, in the future, in FAST U.S.A. and F&ST Canada. You are not alone.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Luthar (2003) and Public Safety Canada (1995) explain that resilience refers to the capability of individuals and systems (families, groups and communities) to cope successfully in the face of significant adversity or risk. Resiliency, however, does not mean absolute protection against the effects of hardship, stress, poverty, hopelessness or lack of opportunity; it instead helps explain why many children, though at risk, do not develop significant problems (Anthony, 1987).

Protective factors, which contribute to resilience, tend to reduce the risk of harm. Often they are extensions of the same variables that act as risk factors (Luthar, 2003). For example, self-esteem can be either a risk factor or a protective factor depending on whether or not it is high or low. Risk and resilience research has proposed three domains that have the potential of providing protective factors for children facing adversity. These domains are child characteristics, family characteristics and community characteristics (Anthony, 1987; Luthar, 2003; Public Safety Canada, 1995).

Child characteristics refer to the child's personality. Certain personality traits have been found to be protective factors against behaviors such as delinquency, aggression, criminal activity and violence (Public Safety Canada, 1995). These traits include self-esteem, trust, optimism and a sense of hope, positive coping skills and sociability. Yates, Egeland, and Sroufe (2003) explain that protective or resilient personality traits begin to form early in life. Some may be innate, while others are greatly affected by family and social influences. Self-esteem in children, for example, mirrors the response of important others. Optimism has its roots in early infancy, in a

child's being able to count on life being good. Competence depends on opportunities, encouragement and support by interested adults (Public Safety Canada, 1995).

Luthar (2003) and Public Safety Canada (1995) state that family characteristics refer to the family context and how factors in that setting contribute to or impede a child's resiliency. Most studies of protective factors and resiliency in young children are done within the family context, as the family is the universe in which young children live (Luthar, 2003). Research emphasizes the importance of the family as a protective factor in the lives of resilient children, especially if family relationships are close, warm and supportive (Anthony, 1987). According to Public Safety Canada (1995), children raised in close families are less likely to develop behavior problems (e.g. defiance). Close relationships, family stability and security are factors in reducing severe psychological stresses in young children. Parental support, supervision and high expectations regarding school are important protective factors for delinquency and other problem behaviors. Parental control, however, is a protective factor only when balanced with warmth, interest and involvement (Public Safety Canada, 1995).

Anthony (1987) and Luthar (2003) state that the last domain of childhood protective factors is made up of influences beyond the immediate family. These influences include extended family, the community and the school. The extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins) can play a supportive role helping children to feel loved and important, providing role models and giving extra guidance as needed. Because friends, neighbors, and community organizations make up the family's social support system, they also play a role in providing these same protective factors (Luthar, 2003; Public Safety Canada, 1995).

Public Safety Canada (1995) states that school is usually recognized for its role in developing knowledge rather than its importance in basic human development, yet it is probably the most important setting for human development outside the home. As a society we place a high value on education and school achievement. This makes the school a place of competition and of success or failure. It is no surprise that the school experience is a powerful risk and protective factor not only for delinquency and crime, but also for substance abuse, mental distress and other problems (Public Safety Canada 1995; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993).

This researcher has had the opportunity to work with students from different age groups over the course of 21 years and in that time has observed students who have displayed resiliency in the face of challenging circumstances. Given the same circumstances other students have turned to drugs, crime, dropping out of school, or other forms of delinquency. It was for this reason that this researcher was drawn to investigating what types of interventions are available to at-risk students in the local community, to help build protective factors around them and their families.

Significance of the Research

McDonald and Frey (1999) suggest that what happens early in a child's life predicts the delinquent, anti-social behaviors that are displayed by youth in the justice system. Longitudinal studies that have followed individuals over a 15 to 30 year time period report the importance of parent involvement in helping predict children's behavior as adults (Werner & Smith, 1992). Werner and Smith (1992) tracked the life-path, from birth to age 30, of approximately 600 individuals to see which of these individuals would be incarcerated as adults. Information was collected on these individuals' families, their

education and their personality characteristics. It was found that 23 percent of these individuals were labeled as troublemakers at age 10 by teachers and parents, 13 percent were involved with the court system by age 18 and 4 percent were jailed as adult criminals by age 30 (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Werner and Smith (1992) found that risk factors such as early childhood trauma, child abuse and poverty tend to correlate with violence, delinquency and criminality during adolescence and adulthood. In contrast, having just one positive, long-term relationship with a significant other (e.g. a parent, teacher, family member or community member) provided the protective factors of feeling loved by parents or another significant person, and being able to talk and confide about difficult and stressful issues. These protective factors not only proved to override risk factors, but helped at-risk youth cope and avoid incarceration as adults (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Werner, & Smith, 1992).

Children come from a myriad of family backgrounds and challenge the educator in how best to work in partnership with parents to positively influence the course of their children's lives while at the same time lending support to the family unit. This influence is important because two critical factors are associated with a youth's staying out of trouble and with decreasing incidences of academic failure. These factors include connections between parents and youth and positive associations with the school (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Resnick et al., 1997). Schedler and Block (1990) found that positive parent involvement with their children predicted long-term positive outcomes and recommended that early relationship-building interventions with families as a system, rather than programs solely directed at youth, increased the likelihood that young

children will avoid undesirable outcomes such as delinquency, poor school performance and substance abuse (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Schedler & Block, 1990).

Positive connectedness has been identified as a critical protective factor in helping at-risk children and their families avoid negative outcomes (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Children's and adolescents' emotional, physical and social problems have become pervasive in our society and have devastating effects on children, families and communities. The school can play a critical role in nurturing healthy connections between people to help offset potential problems faced by youth (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2005).

Consequently, it is important to identify effective interventions at the school level to help prevent serious problems in youth. In particular, an intervention that will promote connectedness in the form of positive, working relationships between the school, teachers, parents and their children can help make school a positive experience for the child, build parent-child relationships and increase parent involvement with their child's school and education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to focus on the experience of one selected family who was involved in the Families and Schools Together (F&ST) program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. F&ST is a school-based intervention program; its goals are to improve family relationships, build stronger family bonds, promote children's successes in school, prevent substance abuse by children and their families, reduce stress that parents and children experience in daily life, increase parent involvement in their children's school and community and provide parents and their

children an opportunity to spend uninterrupted time together (F&ST Canada, 2006).

Narrative inquiry was used to answer the following research question:

What are the experiences of one select family participating in the F&ST program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan?

Interviews were conducted with members of the selected family and questions were used to provide the opportunity to describe and explore their experiences as participants in the F&ST intervention program. The interview questions focused on their experience in being invited to be part of the program, changes that they noticed within themselves and their family during the course of participation, and the benefits or drawbacks they and their family had as a result of participating. The questions also focused on their experiences in connecting with their child's school and in connecting with their community. Findings will help inform other potential participants of the benefits that might come from being involved as a participant in the F&ST program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan.

Explanation of Terms

Over 50% of the population of the community in which this study took place is aboriginal. This statistic includes both Métis and First Nation's people. Métis is the term used to refer to "a person of mixed white and aboriginal ancestry" (Avis, Drysdale, Gregg, & Scargill, 1973, p. 711). First Nation people are "members of certain Indian tribes or bands who may or may not live on reserves and may or may not receive treaty money or other treaty rights" (Avis, Drysdale, Gregg, & Scargill, 1973, p. 1177).

Certain terms are used in this study to designate activities in the F&ST program. Family Flags is an activity in which each family creates a flag, using supplied art

materials, to set on their family table. This flag becomes an identity for them within the context of the F&ST community (i.e. group of attending families). Fixed Lottery is the event in which one family per meeting wins a draw, is showcased and receives various prizes. The winning family is also given the opportunity to cook the F&ST meal at the following week's meeting. Family Tables or Meal is an activity in which the host family, who won the Fixed Lottery the week before, receives money to buy food, plan a menu, and prepare a meal for the other participating F&ST families.

Scribbles is a drawing and talking game that is played with one's own family. Each family member creates a picture from lines that have been previously placed on his or her sheet of paper. Each family member then takes a turn asking positive questions about each other's drawings. Feelings Charades is an activity in which each family member is given the opportunity to act-out, identify and discuss one another's feelings.

Kid's Play and Craft Time are activities organized for the children of participating families. These activities are developmentally appropriate and offer children positive peer group interaction. Parent One On One time provides parents with the opportunity to connect with other parents with the purpose of assisting one another to help their children succeed in school and at home. This connection helps build an informal social support network for parents. Special Play Time is an activity designed to provide one on one time between one parent and his or her child. During this uninterrupted play time, the parent is encouraged to follow the child's lead in choosing and doing an activity without directing or judging the child. Daily Homework refers to the expectation placed on participating parents to continue special play with their children at home each day.

Closing Circle is an activity in which all participants gather into a large circle for special announcements, clapping, singing for birthdays, etc. Graduation refers to the ceremony held to recognize the families who have completed the 8 to 10 week F&ST program. Guests are invited by the families and the F&ST leadership gives each family a certificate of completion.

F&STWORKS is a two-year follow-up group comprised of families who graduate from the regular F&ST program. Monthly meetings are held in which parents determine agendas, receive a small budget, and get support from the school. This follow-up program is designed to strengthen support networks established through the F&ST program.

The term FAST is used to designate the American version of the Family and Schools Together intervention program whereas as F&ST is used to designate the Canadian version. Both versions of the program are identical; however, at present there is no high school F&ST program in Canada. In place of the high school version of F&ST, an Aboriginal version is offered in a number of Canadian communities. In the United States there is a high school version offered, but no aboriginal version.

The term at-risk is used to describe individuals who are more likely than average to develop delinquent behavior or experience academic failure in school because of some predisposing factor such as family history or poor environment.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Intervention: A Background

Paglicci, Dulmus, and Wodarski (2004) state that children and adolescents are being diagnosed earlier and more often with a variety of serious and debilitating disorders from mental illness to diabetes. The personal consequences of these disorders can include developmental delays, school drop-out, future unemployment, poverty, imprisonment and even premature death (Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). From a societal perspective, financial costs, loss of competent citizens, ineffective parents and a future cycle of more problems may also be potential fall-out of these childhood and adolescent disorders and problems (Dulmus & Rapp-Paglicci, 2000; Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). Consequently, it has been argued that a preventive approach to such disorders and problems is more cost effective than treating problems once they occur because prevention can help reduce the chances of developing or exacerbating a disorder (Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004).

Traditionally, the dominant approach to prevention has been the public health model. This model consists of three types of intervention: primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary level seeks to prevent a disorder or problem, the secondary level addresses the treatment of a disorder or problem once it occurs and the tertiary level focuses on rehabilitation of the individual. This model began as an effort to prevent infectious diseases and because of its success was later applied to addressing noninfectious and physical illnesses (Institute of Medicine, 1994; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). Although this model provided a good beginning to prevention, it did

not exclusively focus on preventing a disorder or problem (Dulmus & Wodarski, 1997; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004).

The Institute of Medicine (1994) defines prevention as those interventions that occur before the initial onset of a diagnosable disorder or problem. Unlike the public health model, a preventive approach focuses on interventions that prevent the onset of a disorder or problem. Gordon's (1983) preventive interventions use this perspective and break interventions down into three areas: universal, selective and indicated (Gordon, 1983; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). Universal preventive interventions are designed to target disorders or problems found in the general public, or a whole population, that have not been identified on the basis of individual risk. Selective preventive interventions are targeted at individuals or a sub-group of the population at high risk of developing a specific disorder or problem at some time in the future. Indicated preventive interventions are targeted at high-risk individuals who do not meet the specific criteria for a mental or medical disorder, but who otherwise are identified as having minimal but detectable signs or symptoms of a specific disorder or predisposition for the disorder (Gordon, 1983; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). It is the risk reduction model that nicely complements these three preventive interventions (Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004).

The risk reduction model is a promising approach to prevention in which risk factors are identified and then matched to tested interventions (e.g. universal, selective or indicated interventions) (Institute of Medicine, 1994; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). Risk factors are defined as characteristics, variables or hazards that if present for a particular individual, increase the likelihood that this individual, as opposed

to someone from the general population, will develop a particular disorder or problem (Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1982). Once an at-risk group or individual is identified based on biological, psychological or social risk factors, the group or individual can be targeted with selective preventive interventions (Institute of Medicine, 1994; Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004).

Dulmus and Rapp-Paglicci (2000) state that psychosocial development from early childhood through adulthood is shaped by a variety of specific events, ongoing circumstances, inherent strengths and weaknesses of the individual and family dynamics. Some of these factors can and may adversely affect this psychosocial development. These elements vary widely, but if risk factors can be decreased or altered and protective factors be enhanced, the likelihood of at-risk individuals eventually developing a specific disorder or problem will decrease (Dulmus & Rapp-Paglicci, 2000).

Family Interventions: A Background

Luthar (2003) states that despite the fact research indicates caregivers are an important protective factor in helping to buffer the impact of violence and other types of problems on children, there are few empirically evaluated family-focused interventions. However, empirical support for family-based treatment has been growing over the past decade (Diamond & Josephson, 2005). Reviews of several youth health promotion programs report a need for comprehensive prevention and intervention programs that include families and caregivers (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998). It has been shown that programs exclusively involving youth have proven to be less effective than those that involve parents and caregivers in helping buffer youth from

making unhealthy choices (Farrington & Welsh, 1999, Reese, Vera, Thompson, & Reyes, 2001, Tolan & Guerra, 1994).

Velleman, Templeton, and Copello (2005) state that family influence does not occur in a vacuum; rather, in addition to family influence, there are a number of other determinants of youth delinquency that need to be considered in an effective intervention program. These determinants include intra-personal factors, peer influence, and wider – community and environmental – factors such as media influences, advertising, and environmental deprivation. Even though these determinants need to be considered, researchers and practitioners have assigned a crucial role to the family in the development of or prevention of all delinquent behaviors in youth. Velleman, Templeton, and Copello (2005) further state that there is increasing evidence that the family plays a key role in both prevention and intervention, both through inducing risk or encouraging and promoting protection and resilience. A large body of research has shown that processes within families are central to the etiology of problem behavior from early childhood through early adolescence (Connell, Dishion, Yasui, & Kavanagh, 2007).

Velleman, Templeton, and Copello (2005) explain that there are many findings that demonstrate the importance of family. For example, it has been shown that the strength of parental influence and social factors within the home can impact a young person commencing substance abuse (Wood, Read, Mitchell & Brand, 2004; Clark, 2004; Olsson, Coffey, Bond, Toumbourou & Patton 2003; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002; Ary, Tildesley, Hops, & Andrews, 1993; Forney, Forney & Ripley, 1989). Social factors such as chaotic home environment, ineffective parenting, lack of mutual attachment, low parental affection and warmth, lack of cohesion and high stress have been shown to be

crucially important indicators of risk (Caldwell, Horne, Davidson, & Quinn, 2007; Velleman, Templeton, & Copello, 2005). Consequently, F&ST attempts to intervene early to help at-risk youth succeed in the community, at home and in school. This intervention is accomplished by decreasing social factors within and around the family that contribute to youth delinquency and by building and reinforcing social factors within and around the family that protect youth from these problems (Diamond & Josephson, 2005; McDonald and Frey, 1999).

Families and Schools Together (FAST) – Its Beginning

Statistics Canada (2005) reports that the total number of court cases across Canada involving young offenders has fluctuated between 87,600 and 70,465 per year over a four year period from 1999 – 2003. In the United States, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has also identified fluctuating trends of delinquency and violence among adolescents. It has been widely accepted that increases in delinquency and violence over the past decade are rooted in a number of interrelated social problems that include: child abuse and neglect; alcohol and drug abuse; youth conflict and aggression and early sexual involvement that may originate within the family structure (McDonald & Frey, 1999). For a number of years, Dr. Lynn McDonald, a senior scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, worked with families that included court-ordered youth who were violent, drug and alcohol involved and significantly involved with the court system. While working as an in-home family therapist, she saw distressed youth and their families who were often isolated from friends and family. She believed that it was possible to strengthen families by strengthening identified protective factors such as family relationships.

In reviewing related research, McDonald and Frey (1999) found that families who demonstrated sound communication skills as well as consistent social support were less likely to have children who experience school failure, substance abuse, delinquency and violence (FAST, 2006, Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). By applying the results of her research review to her in-home therapy, McDonald saw dramatic changes in these youth within a three month period (McDonald & Frey, 1999). After only two or three sessions per week, with 24-hour backup support (e.g. a 24-hour help line), 75% of delinquent youths under her care positively altered their circumstances by having less trouble with the law and better relationships at home (FAST, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999; McDonald, 1993; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). These results spurred McDonald to extend this research-based therapy to multi-family groups, which gave birth to the beginning of the FAST intervention program (FAST, 2006).

General Goals

McDonald and Frey (1999) explain that the overall goals of the FAST program are to intervene early to help at-risk youth succeed in the community, at home, and in school. In turn, at-risk youth are able to avoid problems that include adolescent delinquency, violence, addiction and dropping out of school. In order to help ensure that the goals of FAST are achieved, there needs to be a collaborative approach taken by a fully-qualified, trained team (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

F&ST Canada (2006) and McDonald and Frey (1999) state that the collaborative, team approach is the cornerstone of FAST. It builds on the strengths of families, schools,

family service and community organizations so that collectively they achieve results that could not be achieved by one group alone. Each FAST team includes at least four core partners. These four core partners include a representative from a community-based family organization (e.g. social services), a community-based prevention organization (e.g. police force), a public or separate school (e.g. a principal and/or teachers) and a parent from the school community. The cultural and ethnic make-up of the community being served and the age adaptation of the FAST intervention that is used may dictate the inclusion of additional partners to participate as members of the team. In all situations, parents, professionals and volunteers work together as equal partners (F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999).

McDonald and Frey (1999) and the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (2006) state that although FAST began as an early intervention program with at-risk children, it was realized that all families experience stressful life events such as longer working hours and busier lives that often leave parents with little uninterrupted time to spend with their children. As a result, this program has become open to all families to get reconnected to each other and has opened the door to serve families of elementary school, middle school and early childhood children. There is even a model that is currently under research and development, called Baby FAST, which serves teen parents and their families (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

McDonald and Frey (1999) and FAST (2006) state that FAST is an outreach and multi-family group strategy for building protective factors around children as they grow up in stressful, isolated and often toxic environments. It is a multi-level, multi-

dimensional oriented approach grounded in social work which holds the view that people live contextually within a network of relationships and within overlapping systems (Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). In order to improve individual and social functioning, one can intervene at any level – legislative, individual, family, or community. At each level there are distinct theories and therapies and a range of social work intervention strategies that are based on those theories and therapies (McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). FAST attempts to include and integrate several of these levels of intervention in a hands-on, practical way using outreach and multi-family groups within the context of community and institutions such as schools (FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). FAST is based on three general, umbrella theories; namely, social ecological theory, family stress theory and family systems theory.

Social Ecological Theory

Brofenbrenner and Morris (1998) define child development through a social-ecological lens as change that takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between the child and the persons in his or her immediate environment. To be effective, this interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. According to this model, the child is at the center and affects as well as is affected by the settings in which he or she spends time. The most important setting for the child is his or her family, because that is where the child spends the most time. Consequently, the family setting has the most emotional influence on the child (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

The social-ecological theory or model also explains that a child's development is determined by what he or she experiences in various settings. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) state that the experiences that a child has with people in these settings are the primary engines of human development. The number and quality of the connections between the settings in which a young child spends time (e.g. his family and the school) also have important implications for his or her development. These connections include relationships between the important adults in a child's life such as teachers and parents.

Other environments where the child doesn't spend time can also affect the processes that influence development. These environments refer to groups of people or organizations in the geographical area of a school district who have an interest in the well-being of the young children who reside there (e.g. the RCMP) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner (2002) states that social ecological theory of child development assumes that a child's health and development are shaped by many environmental subsystems including family, community, culture, the physical world and the web of social relationships. Consequently, FAST focuses on promoting the child-in-environment fit. Based on social ecological theory, activities are designed to focus on either dyadic or small group relationships relevant to the child's optimum development (Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). Activities focusing on the child-parent and child-family relationship, such as child and parent play time, and family unit time involving a meal, singing and games, are designed to develop progressively complex interactions between the child and his or her family members and to promote positive

interaction. Through these activities, communication skills and reciprocal respect is built, laying the foundation for meaningful sharing (F&ST Canada, 2006).

McDonald and Frey (1999) state that FAST sessions occur over a ten week time period and homework is assigned to the parents on a weekly basis. The ten week timeline, combined with weekly homework, helps to encourage parents to practice newly gained skills in interacting with their family members on a regular basis over an extended period of time.

In order to encourage the connection between the settings in which the child spends time (e.g. his or her school), FAST meetings are held in the child's school and teachers are encouraged to take on leadership roles at FAST meetings in order to develop connections with school families. In addition to connections between settings the child spends time in, community members (e.g. RCMP, addictions counselors, etc.) with an interest in the welfare of children and their families are also encouraged to get involved as FAST volunteers, thereby establishing connections between families and local community organizations (F&ST Canada, 2006). Because of the fact FAST is a multi-family program, it also provides connections between families within their community and provides an informal support network. Activities such as Craft Time and Kid's Play Time are designed to help establish a web of supportive, social relationships between the child's peers (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Family Stress Theory

Professor Reuben Hill's theory of family stress was formulated after the Great Depression and is based on extensive observations of families who survived the depression contrasted with families who did not (Wisconsin Center for Educational

Research, 2006). As Hill interviewed family members who had lost their jobs and were existing in extreme poverty, he looked for factors that contributed to family survival in those circumstances. From the data he collected, Hill theorized that there are two complex variables that act to buffer the family from acute stressors and reduce the direct correlation between multiple stressors and family crises. These two variables were formulated into what is called the ABCX theory of family stress (Smith, 1984; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

According to Hill, the ABCX model describes the process of how four variables interact and lead up to family crises. The process follows a pattern of: A (the event) interacting with B (internal and external resources and social supports available to the family) interacting with C (the definition and perception the family makes of the event) producing X (the crises) (Smith, 1984).

Hill (1983) states that within the ABCX model of family stress theory, it is the B and C factors that act as protective buffers against individual and family stress. The first buffer includes social relationships, which are referred to as B Factor. B Factor is distinguished as being within-family variables such as attachment, positive family bonds, effective communication, as well as across-family variables such as social isolation vs. informal and formal social support networks. The second protective factor includes perceptions, which are referred to as C Factor and include the range in perceptions and attitudes with regard to hope, personal effectiveness, despair and helplessness. Together, these two protective factors relate with chronic and acute stressors to predict family crises (FAST, 2006, Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Hill (1983) states that the impact of these negative social, ecological and family stress factors can be muted or buffered with the enhancement of protective factors. With this in mind, each of FAST's program activities deliberately attempts to build the B and C factors identified in Hill's family stress theory (Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). Positive bonds and social relationships (B Factor) are directly promoted through select activities on six distinct levels of the child's social ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 2002): at-risk child-to-parent bond, family unit bonds, parent-to-parent bond, parent to self-help group bonds, parent affiliation to school and parent linkages to community treatment/counseling agencies (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). Each of these specified relationships is systematically altered with structured, interactive activities to decrease the impact of family stress on family functioning. As a result of building positive, protective factor B (bonds and relationships) among family members and between families, it is theorized that factor C will also be strengthened (increased hope in the face of adversity) and will buffer the family against potential crises (Smith, 1984).

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory emerged from the work of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy's work on general systems theory (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Whitchurch & Constantine (1993) state that a general systems theory perspective examines the way components of a system interact with one another to form a whole. Rather than just focusing on each of the separate parts, a systems perspective focuses on the connectedness, the interrelation and interdependence of all the parts that make up the whole (Turnbull & Turnbull III, 1990; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). A common

analogy is: the cake that comes out of the oven is more than the eggs, flour, oil, baking soda and vanilla that make up the parts or elements of the cake. It is how these elements combine to form something larger than the ingredients that make the cake. Such is true with families as well. It is more than who makes up the family; it is how the members come together that defines that family (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1999).

Whitchurch and Constantine (1993) explain that a systems perspective permits one to see how a change in one component of the system affects the other components of the system. That change in turn affects the initial component. The application of this theory has particular relevance to the family as families are comprised of individual members who share a history, have some degree of emotional bonding, and develop strategies for meeting the needs of individual members and the family as a group. Family systems theory allows one to understand the organizational complexity of families, as well as the interactive patterns that guide family interactions (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1999).

McDonald and Frey (1999) state that based on family systems theory, FAST has designed intervention activities to strengthen the family as a whole. Family systems theory states that if there is no or little hierarchical structure, developmental or situational events increase family stress, rigidity, chaos, and dysfunctionality, throwing the family into crises (Gladding, 2004). As a result, FAST activities are designed to support parent authority and child compliance and respect for the parent (FAST, 2004). Some activities designed to promote healthy communication between family members and emotional connectedness include Family Meal, Scribbles and Feelings Charades. In addition to that, these activities provide support to parents in experiencing being in charge of their

children, the setting of healthy boundaries and the building of respect for one another. According to the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (2006), family systems therapists agree that over time all families repeat interactional routines that can become destructive. Rather than focusing on the specifics of the potentially destructive routines which might have become familiar to families, FAST activities provide them with the opportunity to repeatedly rehearse a totally positive set of family routines.

Practice

McDonald and Frey (1999) and FAST (2006) state that the FAST program assumes that families are under stress and need social support. One of the basic values of FAST is that all parents love their children and want a better life for them. Hill (1983) theorized that social isolation significantly increases the impact of multiple stressors on family functioning while positive social supports minimize the impact. It has also been found that the combination of high stress with social isolation for families has been highly correlated with many forms of dysfunctional family outcomes (McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Simons et al., 1993; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). Though the F&ST program never directly focuses on risk per se, it does apply six research-based strategies that are used to build protective factors for youth and their families.

Though some studies do indicate that individuals who experience a high degree of stressors at one time are at increased risk for family crises, this finding does not apply to all families (FAST, 2004; Pianta, Egeland & Srouf, 1988; Rutter, 1983; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). The six research-based strategies that the FAST program incorporates to help build, strengthen and maintain protective factors address

each child's interpersonal bonds, the family system and parent to parent support. These strategies also address the parent social network, parent empowerment training and school-community affiliation (McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). McDonald and Frey (1999) state that research studies on delinquency show that the quality of a child's or an adult's interpersonal bonds can inhibit or exacerbate aggression and violence. In each session of the FAST program every child is given 15 minutes of one-to-one, uninterrupted time with his or her parent(s) to be spent in play or discussion. The parent is coached by program team members to follow the child's lead in play and not to boss, teach or correct the child; this coaching is conducted in a way so as not to undermine parental authority by guarding against the use of lecture or directives to parents (McDonald & Frey 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Parents practice this skill at the weekly FAST meeting and are then asked to play with their children one-to-one at home on a daily basis. Minuchin (1986), Alexander (1973) and Satir (1983) suggest that this uninterrupted, one-on-one parent-child play/discussion time is at the core of the program intervention and is consistent with structural family systems theory. It also enhances the protective factor of relational bonding and hierarchical structure by promoting the passing of information for initiating and guiding activities through the parents to the child so that parental authority is supported.

Some research shows that this nondirective, nonjudgmental play and discussion time reduces a child's problem behaviors at home and at school, improves the parent-child bond and simultaneously builds self-esteem (Kogan, 1978; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin

Center for Educational Research, 2006) Upon graduation from the program it has been found that 62% of the parents still do special play and discussion time with their children once a week two years after completing the program (McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Treatment of delinquent youth shows that changing the patterns of family involvement reduces the chance of the child returning to unhealthy patterns of anti-social behavior (Alexander & Parsons, 1973, 1982; McDonald & Frey, 1999). When families are strong and cohesive, trust one another, share emotions together, communicate openly, and resolve conflicts easily they can survive many hardships (FAST, 2006; Lewis, Beavers, Gossett & Phillips, 1976; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). Conversely, a disengaged, conflicted, disorganized family is considered to be a causal factor for violence and delinquency, substance abuse and school failure (FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Lewis, Beavers, Gossett and Phillips (1976) and Sayger (1992) state that three critical factors are essential to a healthy family. They are hierarchy (i.e. Are the parents in charge of the family?), cohesion (i.e. Are the family members connected?) and conflict (i.e. Is it resolved?). The FAST program addresses these factors by systematically strengthening the family unit with hour-long weekly sessions by helping the parents to be both firmly in charge and relationally connected to their child. Activities include parents delegating their child to serve their food during the family meal, working together to construct a family flag, drawing and talking about drawing, play-acting feelings and guessing each other's feelings. The parents also oversee the family communication games at their own table and allow each family member to speak and be heard, forming

the basis for healthy conflict resolution. These activities also encourage the development of parental skills in requesting compliant behavior and in monitoring their child's behavior (McDonald et al, 1999, FAST, 2006, Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

It has been shown that over time, social isolation undercuts the effectiveness of parenting, despite successful parent training efforts (Egeland, Breitenbycher & Rosenberg ,1980; FAST, 2006; Pianta, Egeland & Sroufe, 1988; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). In addition to this, high stress and social isolation have been identified as being the biggest predictors of abuse or neglect, with child abuse being correlated with later delinquency (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Schedler & Block, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). It has been shown that regular daily intimate support from other parents is a protective factor that keeps stressed and depressed mothers from abusing and neglecting their children (McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). This social support increases the likelihood that parents will use newly learned parenting skills (FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006; Wahler, 1983). Wahler (1983) states that parents who have been highly trained in behavior modification parenting skills have stopped using those skills six months later if they feel socially isolated.

McDonald and Frey (1999) and FAST (2006) state that in order to facilitate such support and reduce social isolation, the FAST program uses two strategies during each weekly session. The first involves parents being paired off, based on either existing relationships (e.g. husband and wife) or new relationships (for parents who attend on

their own) to discuss issues. Second, they are then brought back together in a parent self-help group to discuss issues that are important to them.

For eight to ten weekly sessions, for 15 to 45 minutes at a time, parents with common experience are able to cluster with uninterrupted time to connect. In the parent group time, curriculum or instruction is superseded by establishing an environment where feelings of social connection and safety are paramount. Parents are encouraged to find their own voice as individuals and as a group by taking informal turns to speak and be heard on topics of their own choosing and concern; the only restriction is that no didactic presentation on parenting is allowed (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

The goals of this approach are to encourage the process of sharing, promote the gradual building of supportive relationships with others who are working at the same activity (e.g. raising a child) and reduce social isolation, especially for women. Such parent-to-parent bonding is correlated with many positive child outcomes (FAST, 2006; Minuchin, 1986; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). Follow-up studies show that 86% of parents involved in the program report that they made new friends and that the parent group is their favorite part of FAST because it shows them they are not alone and they feel that their advice is valued by other parents (Belle, 1980; McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Research conducted by McDonald and Frey (1999) and Resnick et al. (1997) show that two crucial factors are significantly associated with youth staying out of trouble: connections between parents and youth and positive associations with the

school. Few parents of at-risk children report incidents of being notified by their child's school because of a positive event, even though many positive events may have occurred (FAST, 2006; McDonald, 1993; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Parent involvement in the school system is integral to the academic achievement and psychosocial functioning of the child. It has been noted that a mother's involvement in her child's school activities affects the child's school performance independent of the mother's educational status (FAST, 2006; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

The Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (2006) explains that the FAST program works to increase the at-risk youths' and their families' feelings of affiliation with the school and addresses barriers to parental involvement in order to establish parent-school relationships. The first step toward establishing this relationship is through positive, low-key interaction with school personnel outside of the regular school day to help facilitate relationships that are not based on their at-risk child's problem behaviors. Informal interactions with school personnel also help open the door to enabling the parents to establish respectful relationships with addiction counselors, family therapists and counselors of domestic violence. Over time these relationships can result in an increase in the appropriate use of school opportunities and services by parents (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Second, the FAST implementation team takes the responsibility of identifying adaptations of the program that will accommodate parents' circumstances (e.g. providing transportation and child care and accommodating parents' schedules). Third, care is taken to construct a program team that represents parents culturally and includes parents

as team members. Fourth, the school partner for the collaborative team serves as a link between parent and family networks and school networks. Fifth, the principal for each school is required to attend the FAST graduation and hear parents' feedback about the program implementation and sixth, the strategies used to support parental authority help parents connect the cultures of home with the cultures of school for their children (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

FASTWORKS is a two-year follow-up support component to FAST that has been developed to provide continued support and development of parent-school relationships. McDonald and Frey (1999) and FAST (2006) have reported that two to four years after graduation, 75% of the parents report increased involvement in the schools, 26% self-refer to family counseling and 8% to substance abuse treatment. These results show that self-motivated parents are more likely to use appropriate services fully - one of the key outcomes of FAST (McDonald & Frey, 1999). In addition to this, McDonald states that 91% of parents who graduated from the program reported an increased involvement in community activities some of which included pursuing further education for themselves, attending church and obtaining employment. After having participated in this intervention, most families no longer feel socially isolated and both youth and parents report the availability of stronger formal and informal social networks to assist them in stressful situations (McDonald & Frey, 1999; McDonald, 1997).

There is increasing support for the idea that successful parenting is correlated with high parental self-esteem, having a feeling of power within one's family unit, and a sense of self-efficacy within society (FAST, 2006; Gaudin et. al., 1993; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). In FAST, when parents are empowered or are in charge of

their children and connected to other parents and the community, they can both increase the safety of their neighborhoods and better monitor their child's behavior (McDonald & Frey, 1999). Successful implementation of this empowerment component of the program requires values-based team training in which each FAST team reviews and discusses the underlying beliefs of the program. These beliefs include the idea that every parent loves his or her child and that, with informal and formal social support, every parent can be the primary delinquency prevention agent for his or her child (F&ST Canada, 2006, McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Program activities are structured to increase the power of each parent systematically through separate sets of relationships found within the family, the school and the community through frequent rehearsals of behavior and experiences of success (McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). For example, parents are encouraged to control their children without the use of coercion thereby empowering them within the immediate family. Within the school the parents are empowered by becoming a collaborating partner and co-facilitator on the FAST team and actively participate in their child's education. In the community they are empowered by taking the opportunity to assume leadership roles (e.g. community coaching) (McDonald & Frey, 1999; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

There are five distinct age groups of children who are served through the FAST program (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). These age groups are: infants (newborns to 3yrs old), early childhood (3 to 5 yrs old), school-aged (5 to 8 yrs old), pre-teens (9 to 12 yrs old), and high school (14 to 18

years old). Adaptations to program activities can be made depending on the age and culture of the target children being worked with; however, the structure of the program remains consistent. Adaptations could range from using age and ability appropriate activities, or activities that would incorporate some aspect of the child's culture. For example, during Aboriginal F&ST native crafts could be taught during craft time such as bead work or wild meat could be incorporated into the Family Meal. Encouraging elders to act as F&ST volunteers could also be encouraged. Unlike the United States, there is no FAST program available for high school students in Canada. Instead, there has been a program developed for aboriginal children and their families (F&ST Canada, 2006).

Training

F&ST Canada (2006) and McDonald and Frey (1999) state that training is a critical component to the successful implementation of the program. This certification process is necessary because without a certified trainer, no sites can start or initiate a program (FAST, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999). McDonald and Frey (1999) explain that training involves a three phase process. The first phase involves a two-day orientation and focuses on the role and expertise of team members. This orientation is held three to five weeks prior to the first session of FAST. Phase two involves FAST trainers coming to the program site where they provide close supervision to leaders learning the elements of program delivery. This is done through two on-site visits and telephone consultation during the initial eight or ten week program session. Phase three involves having new team members participate in a one-day session to debrief, evaluate and share their experiences. They then participate in planning a two-year support follow-

up to families through a program called FASTWORKS, based on feedback from graduate parents of the FAST program. An annual Train-the-Trainer and Leadership development workshop is also offered to certified team members who have participated in training and in one of the eight to ten week programs (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Recruitment

The school principal and teachers work together to identify children who would benefit most from participating in the intervention. Children recruited for the program are either at least one year behind their expected grade level, exhibit a tendency toward bullying and aggressive behavior, are very anxious and withdrawn, have a very short attention span, or demonstrate uneven performance both academically and behaviorally in the classroom (McCarthy, 2005; McDonald & Frey, 1999). According to Ensminger, Kellam and Rubin (1983) and McDonald and Frey (1999) a display of one or more of these attributes, if found in an eight year-old, have been shown to predict teenage delinquency and violence. Other studies show that classroom aggression in first grade predicts aggressive behavior in seventh grade unless there is some form of intervention (Kellam et al., 1998; McDonald & Frey, 1999). It has been shown that teachers can spot eight year-olds who, without intervention, are more at risk than their peers to spend time in jail later in life (Gullotta et al., 1998; McDonald et al., 1999).

Following the recommendations of the principal/teacher team, the family of an at-risk child is invited to voluntarily participate in the program by a FAST parent graduate who conducts home out-reach visits. Because of local control, each school makes a decision about which families it invites to any particular eight to ten week FAST

gathering; in most cases, 10-15 families are invited to participate. In some school settings, in order to avoid singling out some children as at-risk, universal invitations are given to all school families regardless of their status (F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999; Pridmore, 2003).

Structure of Program

FAST (2006) and F&ST Canada (2006) explain that each session follows a standard 2 ½-hour agenda and involves the program leaders as facilitators. It begins with the Opening Tradition (15 minutes) that involves a general greeting and a song followed by Family Tables (45 minutes) in which FAST teams provide support to parental authority by putting parents in charge of activities at their tables.

During Family Tables, families eat meals together and participate in structured, child-appropriate family table communication activities. Following the Family Table session is the Mutual Peer Support Time (one hour) during which parents gather for discussion, and children gather for age-appropriate activities to build connections with one another. One-to-one FAST parent-child communication time (15 minutes) comes next during which the FAST team coaches parents to provide play therapy for elementary school children.

In the middle school curriculum, the FAST team coaches parents to discuss youth-selected topics with their youth. In the Closing Tradition (15 minutes) activities such as celebrating winners, thanking hosts, and announcing and sharing build multifamily community and FAST team cohesion (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999; Pridmore, 2002; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Upon graduation, each group of families joins an on-going collective of interdependent families that meet monthly for two years in meetings called FASTWORKS. These meetings enable families to tailor agendas to their own needs. Typically, each meeting includes the FAST opening and closing traditions and 15 minutes of one-to-one special play/discussion time between parent and child. The rest of the meeting is planned by the families with support from a collaborative team including parents who have graduated from the FAST program (FAST, 2004; F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

By emphasizing connectedness between families, FASTWORKS sustains the relationships that originally developed from participating in the eight to ten week FAST program. Over time, these relationships evolve into a local support network of parents with common experiences and shared goals and acts as a protective factor for at-risk youth and their families against the stresses of daily living (F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Replication

McDonald and Frey (1999) state that FAST has been widely replicated in other locations within the United States and in a number of other countries including Australia. To replicate FAST, six key elements are required. These elements include: a standard FAST team trainer structure, restricted access to FAST program training materials, program adaptability, use of uniform manuals and process checklists, technical assistance, and site-specific program evaluation.

The standard team trainer structure takes one year to complete and includes observing a program session, completing a week of classes at a training center and

training a team under supervision. FAST team trainers are responsible for leading exercises to build cohesion among potential leaders and working to adapt the program to incorporate local challenges (e.g. degree of student need) and unique contextual factors (e.g. culture or geographical issues). There are also standardized manuals and process checklists – consistent documents that enable team trainers to monitor the process and integrity of the team’s implementation of the program. There is technical assistance during three site visits. Certified team trainers visit each new site to observe the program directly and help the team adapt FAST to the needs of the particular site. Before and after implementation of the program, new sites must submit data including an outcome evaluation report (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

McDonald and Frey (1999) explain that ten years after the first FAST program was implemented, the program was replicated in more than 450 schools in 31 states and 5 countries. It has won numerous national awards as a research-based, family-strengthening, family-supporting, collaborative prevention/early intervention program. It has been continually evaluated at each new site and is being systematically replicated with certified team trainers by four states and two national organizations.

In Canada, the FAST program was adopted in 1996 at three local schools in Calgary, Alberta. In 1998, F&ST Canada was established as a partnership between the Alliance for Children and Families in the United States, Family Service Canada, and the Catholic Family Services of Calgary. The purpose behind this partnership was to coordinate training and promote the expansion of the F&ST program in Canada. It is presently being implemented in over 40 communities and in seven provinces (F&ST Canada, 2006).

Outcomes

Outcome evaluation data were collected from statewide replications at 30 Wisconsin schools and by the state of California at 12 California schools. Data from both locations showed high statistical significance ($p < 0.01$) in improvements on five measures (Moos' Family Environment Scale, Olson's Family Adaptability Scales, Abidin's subscale of the Parenting Stress Inventory, Epstein's Parent Involvement Scale and Consumer Feedback and Satisfaction Scale), using paired, two-tailed t-tests. Parents reported a 25% improvement at home, and teachers reported a 20% improvement at school after only eight weeks of program participation. Reductions were noted in several categories of problems such as behavior problems (e.g. bullying, hitting, stealing and lying), withdrawal and anxiety (e.g. insecurity and social isolation), and attention span problems (e.g. lack of focus and distraction) (Billingham, 1993; McDonald, 1993; McDonald & Frey, 1999). In addition to this study, a complete follow-up study of all FAST families in Madison, Wisconsin focused on improvements in child functioning. Parents reported that gains were maintained two to four years after graduation from the program.

The follow-up study showed that participation in the FAST program helped children improve their third-grade reading scores. Based on a two-year follow-up of families, the improved functioning of the child, the improved family cohesiveness, and the increase in social involvement of FAST parents in their child's school and community seemed to be long-term impacts of the program (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

As in the United States, the impact of F&ST in Canada has been impressive. F&ST Canada (2006) states that based on research data collected from 1996 to 2004,

results indicate significant improvement in children's behavior in the school and an improved level of family involvement in the school and community. For example, 73% of parents in the program reported a significant decrease in overall behavior problems of their children, and teacher scores showed a nearly 20% decrease in total child behavior problem scores after only eight weeks (including a 200% increase in how often parents worked on school work with their child). In addition, there were statistically significant decreases in all behavior problems measured including a 25% decrease in conduct disorder, 22% decrease in attention problems and a 26% decrease in anxiety and withdrawal. Affiliation with a parent-teacher organization was also noted to have more than doubled to nearly 20% of parent graduates of the program. In addition, a 20%-60% increase in active participation in a parent-teacher organization was realized (F&ST Canada, 2006).

Its Importance

According to Hawkins (1996), research studies have shown that if a youth has more than five risk factors, there was a strong likelihood that the youth had, at most, one protective factor. Without protective factors in place, or the enhancement of existing protective factors, there is greater likelihood of future delinquent behavior (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Schedler & Block, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). Consequently, researchers encourage the development and implementation of interventions that offer opportunities for interactive, personal and positive relationship building to increase protective factors for at-risk youth and reduce negative outcomes in youth (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Pollard, Hawkins & Arthur, in press). McDonald and Frey (1999), FAST (2006) and

F&ST Canada (2006) state that the FAST program strives to address this need for connecting and developing relationships.

Summary

Resilience has been defined as the capability of individuals and systems to cope successfully in the face of significant adversity or risk (Luthar, 2003). Research has found that, in the face of adversity, protective factors such as having at least one positive relationship with a significant other (e.g. parent or teacher) has proven to override risk factors and help at-risk youth and their families avoid negative outcomes. Studies have found that by reinforcing and increasing protective factors, risk factors can be buffered against and the likelihood of an at-risk child eventually developing delinquency problems will be decreased. Sources of protective factors that have been identified include personal characteristics of the individual, the family context and contexts outside of the home (e.g. the school and community organizations) (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

Both the United States and Canada have reported an increase in delinquency and violence among adolescents (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Statistics Canada 2005). This finding has raised the need to design interventions in order to address this alarming situation. It is the preventive approach that has been identified as the most cost effective way of addressing this concern, because its goal is to focus on intervention that prevents the onset of a disorder or problem as opposed to addressing a problem after it has already occurred. Research has shown, however, that intervention programs exclusively involving youth have proven to be less effective than those that involve parents and caregivers (Farrington & Welsh, 1999; Reese, Vera, Thompson, & Reyes, 2001; Tolan &

Guerra, 1994). In light of this, practitioners have identified that the family plays a crucial role in both prevention and intervention. This realization has spurred the development of intervention programs involving the whole family.

The F&ST program is a preventive, multi-family intervention program based on three theoretical approaches. These approaches are: the social-ecological theory, family stress theory and family systems theory. Based on these theories, activities are designed to promote and build protective factors such as close relationships among family members, connectedness between the school and home, and connectedness between family members and their community.

Outcome data gathered from F&ST participants have shown that there has been significant improvement noted with regard to children's behavior in the school and home, attitude toward school on the part of parents and their children, parental involvement in their child's school and their community, children's academic performance and improved relationships at home.

Given this scenario, the purpose of this study is to discover what the experiences are of one family participating in the F&ST program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Inquiry

F&ST has been implemented in Canada in over 40 communities and seven provinces since 1996. One of these communities is located in a small town in Northwestern Saskatchewan. Over 50% of this community is of aboriginal descent, including all groups from First Nations to Métis. There are three elementary schools, one junior high school, one high school, one private school and one college/technical training school (Meadow Lake School Division, 2002; Sasknews, 2007). Within this community, one school initiated its first F&ST program in the fall of 2005.

This school serves approximately 250 students from kindergarten to grade four with a relatively high representation of transient, low income, single parent families (primarily single mothers). Based on these unique demographics, one of the F&ST models chosen to implement at the school was Elementary F&ST. The program has now run for two years and was evaluated in the fall of 2005. Measurement instruments found in the F&ST evaluation package were administered to nine families who participated in an eight week session of the program. The data were quantitative in nature but was not comprehensive because it primarily described the children and families involved in the program, aspects of the program's implementation, and outcomes for some of the participating families (Barrington Research Group Inc, 2005).

The Barrington Research Group Inc. (2005) published its report in the fall of 2005. Parent responses to some of the questions indicated that F&ST had provided

parents with one-on-one time with their children, it provided a break to their day to day routines and it had taught them different ways of doing things with their children. The parents also indicated that they had come to know more of the school staff and realized that the school staff was there to support them as parents. In addition, the parents stated that involvement in the F&ST program showed them that they were not alone in making mistakes with their children – it actually provided them with an opportunity to share and learn parenting techniques with others (Barrington Research Group Inc, 2005).

There has been some question raised as to the accuracy in which these evaluation results contained within the report portray the experiences of those participating in the program. This is due to the fact that there is a limited representation of family outcomes – not all families filled out a questionnaire (Barrington Research Group Inc., 2005). The principal of the school states that the literacy level of some families who were asked to participate in the surveys may have been a crucial factor in missed items and unreturned surveys. Writing and reading have been identified as a major barrier to some families at the school; as a result some families who participate in F&ST struggle with low literacy ability. Coupled with this fact is that no assistance was given to families in filling out these instruments; consequently, the results may not truly reflect what is going on with families in relation to the program.

The concern surrounding these questionable results supports the value of applying a qualitative approach to investigating the impact of F&ST on a selected family. By studying a family's story of being involved with the program, in-depth information will be generated that would otherwise be missed using only a survey. This is desirable because it is believed by school administration that participant stories will make more of

a meaningful impact in drawing families to F&ST and encouraging program leadership in contrast to reading a set of numbers, charts and graphs. With this in mind a qualitative approach was used to research the question, What are the experiences of one select family participating in the F&ST program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan?

Qualitative research inquiry informed by narrative methodology was selected for this particular study. Holloway and Wheeler (1995) defined qualitative research as, “research that derives data from observations, interviews, or verbal interactions and focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the participants” (p. 223). Using this framework, my goal was to make sense of one select family’s experience as a participant in the F&ST intervention program at an elementary school in Northwestern Saskatchewan.

Seidmen (1998) stressed the importance of reflecting on the meaning of experience stating, “Making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation” (p.12). In this study, interviews were used to gather stories from the members of one select family who participated in the F&ST program at an elementary school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. Using a narrative methodology, I came to understand what it means for each family member to have participated in the F&ST program, changes they have noticed within themselves and their family during the course of participation, any benefits or discomfort the family has experienced as a result of participating, as well as experiences of the parents in connecting with their child’s school and in connecting with their community.

Narrative Methodology

Egudo and Mitchell (2003) state that the narrative approach can be used as an alternative for the study of human action. It is an interpretive approach in the social sciences and involves using storytelling methodology. As such, narrative methodology becomes an object of study, focusing on how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives. Creswell (2007) describes narration as:

A qualitative research form, where the researcher renders a person's life stories into a collection of data. By attempting to construe a written picture of history through a personal story, researchers can share history as a live oral story. A narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data, reporting individual experiences and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual. (p. 1).

As the participating family members told their story, I attempted to capture the essence of their experiences with F&ST and used their story to help inform other at-risk children and their families of the benefits that might come from being involved in the program at this elementary school. Insights into possible ways to improve the program, and affirmations of what was already happening were also gleaned from participant stories.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that narrative is a key way of writing and thinking about experience - experience which Mishler (1995) said can be elaborated and transformed through the dialogues of questions and responses. Consequently, participants answered a number of guiding questions through which a sensible and meaningful story was presented that only first-hand experience can produce.

Mishler (1995) stated that the researcher must hear the story, avoid interjecting in ways that interrupt its telling and demonstrate understanding of its point; as a result, my role was to hear the family's story – not share like experiences. The only time that I as the researcher interrupted was for reasons of clarification or to present the next guiding question. I was also conscious of my non-verbal body language (e.g. eye contact and body position) in order to convey sincerity, interest and acknowledgement of each family member's story during the interview process.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that because people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, the researcher's role is to describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them and write narratives of the experience. Consequently, as the researcher it was my goal to retell the story of the selected, participating family's experiences based on themes and concepts gleaned from individual family member stories.

Mishler (1995) stated that through our concepts and methods – our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specification of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives – we construct each participant's story and the meaning behind it. As the person responsible for re-telling this family's experience in the F&ST program, it was my intent to reconstruct the participant's story in order that the reader might come to know and understand the experience of this family as revealed in their story. It was also my intent that through the use of narrative, the participating family might gain a deeper awareness of the resulting impact their participation in F&ST has had on themselves and their family. Josselson and Lieblich (1999) explained that

when an individual tells stories about their life the point is to make their life not only more understandable to themselves, but also more bearable. The narrative in this study provided a means for the participating family to share their experiences and provide the building material to reconstruct what it was like for them to participate in the F&ST intervention program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan.

Data Collection

Because of the nature of this study, I worked in conjunction with school administration and F&ST team members in selecting a family through purposeful sampling. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) defined purposeful sampling as “the process of selecting cases that are likely to be information rich with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study” (p.767). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state that “sampling occurs purposefully, rather than by some form of random selection from a purposefully chosen population, as in quantitative research” (p.76). Purposeful sampling was used to select the participant family so as to provide rich information about what it is like to be a participant in the F&ST program.

Because school administration and F&ST team leadership already had some familiarity with families in attendance at the selected elementary school, communication was established with the selected family by telephone – initially by the principal, in order to minimize any anxiousness on the part of the potential candidate, and then followed-up by myself. The criteria used for selecting the family for this study were:

1. Parent(s) and children (the family unit) must all be, or have been, a participant in the F&ST program at the selected elementary school.

2. Participants must be willing and be comfortable with the process of telling their experiences in the interview setting.
3. Participants must have been a participant in the F&ST program at the selected elementary school within the last two years.
4. There must be at least one at-risk child within the home, in terms of academic performance or behavior.
5. Each family member must demonstrate at least one personal area of challenge that would benefit from participation in F&ST.

Glesne and Peshlin (1992) emphasized that the researcher's awareness of the participant's needs figures into the researcher-participant relationship. This awareness causes the researcher to be understanding, empathetic, supportive, and if possible, contributory in a way that reflects the participant's personal needs. In my contact with the participating family, it was my goal to establish a relationship built on respect, integrity, honesty and empathy by being sensitive to each family member's experience and feelings. I strove to convey my sincere interest in each person's uniqueness as a person - not just as a research subject. It was also my responsibility to accept each family member's thinking and perception of what they experienced as a participating F&ST member and what that has meant to them, while at the same time validating and affirming their experience as they have lived it.

Interviewing

Within the unstructured context, the active interview process was used. The active interview is a process whereby "the production is spontaneous, yet structured – focused within loose parameters provided by the interviewer who is an active participant"

(Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.123). Fontana and Frey (2000) define unstructured interviewing as “an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (p.653). It was through the use of guiding, open-ended questions that I strove to gain a perspective of the experiences the chosen family had as a result of participating in the F&ST program at this elementary school (see Appendix A). My role was to initiate the narrative through questions that addressed family member’s experience and allowed their responses to determine whether particular questions were necessary or appropriate as leading frames of reference for interview conversations (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

In this study, I actively interviewed the parents and children of the selected family and discovered how they understood and made meaning of their experiences. The intent was to encourage them to talk about how participation in F&ST impacted them personally and as a family unit. The questions acted as a guide, but at the same time, ensured that the interviewee’s story was told from his or her point of view, in his or her own way, and that the story made sense to the person being interviewed. Each interview was audio taped and then transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research data analysis is an on-going process that has been described as simultaneous with data collection (Merriam, 2002). The analysis can also yield new constructs, hypotheses and insights (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Merriam (2002) explain that “simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting data collection and to test emerging concepts, themes and categories against subsequent data” (p.14). This

process is inductive in nature in that one begins with a unit of data (e.g. any meaningful word, phrase, or narrative) and compares it to another unit of data, and so on, all the while looking for common patterns and themes across the data (Merriam, 2002).

Holstein and Gurbrium (1995) state that concurrent collection of data and analysis allows for guidance, which can eliminate excess or unnecessary data, and Merriam (2002) suggested that analysis be done as soon as possible after each interview. Consequently, data that was collected were analyzed shortly thereafter, reviewed by the participants and excess or unnecessary data deleted. For example, if data were collected that had no direct bearing on the research question, the specific data was determined to be irrelevant and subsequently deleted.

The participants received written transcripts of their interviews to provide them with the opportunity to present feedback on the accuracy of the transcription. The transcripts were presented to the participating family as soon as possible after the interviews to increase the dependability of participant recall. By using an inductive process of collecting, eliminating and analyzing the data, emerging themes and concepts provided a picture and understanding of the chosen family's experiences as a participant in the F&ST program.

Validity

Guba and Lincoln (1989) understand validity through the lens of authenticity and fairness. Morris (1973) defines authenticity as “the condition or quality of being authentic (having an undisputed origin), trustworthy or genuine” (pp.88-89). Lincoln and Guba (2000) define fairness as a “quality of balance; that is, all stakeholders' views, perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices should be apparent in the text” (p. 180). To

ensure authenticity and fairness, all participants' voices were heard and their stories treated fairly and with balance. Consequently, all transcripts and stories were read and approved, with no subsequent changes, by the participating family members (see Appendix B and Appendix C).

Because there was the possibility of multiplicity of meanings and perspectives on the part of the parents and children in the participating family, it was important to be aware of my own prejudices and biases that might encroach on a fair interpretation of the data. Altheide and Johnson (1998) state that "as we strive to make ourselves, our activities, and our claims more accountable, a critical step is to acknowledge our awareness of a process that may actually impede and prevent our adequate understanding of all relevant dimensions of an activity" (p. 303). In this study, every effort was made to ensure that all of the research findings were treated with authenticity, fairness and balance.

Trustworthiness

Morris (1973) defines trustworthy as "warranting trust (firm reliance on the integrity of someone or something); dependable; reliable" (p. 1378). Merriam (2002) suggested that it is the descriptions, the words (not numbers), that persuade the reader of the trustworthiness of the research findings. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) defined description as "a richly detailed report that re-creates a situation and as much of its context as possible, along with the meanings and intentions inherent in that situation" (p. 773). In this study, description was used to present the narrative of the participating family's experiences in the F&ST program.

Glaser (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) affirms that “often informants will be able to confirm immediately the accuracy and validity of the study, and may even, at that time, offer additional stories to confirm the model further” (p. 77). The participating family in this study shared in the process of establishing trustworthiness by reading, correcting and approving all raw data of interview transcripts and the resulting narratives. By reading the data, and their individual recreated stories, they were able to verify that I reflected each respondent’s perspective, inform me of areas that were problematic, and help me develop new ideas and interpretations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Ethical Considerations

This study used the ethical guidelines as required by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics and Behavioral Science Research. Matters such as informed consent of the participating family and F&ST leadership, voluntary participation, protection of privacy (e.g. confidentiality, coded data, anonymity, pseudonyms and securely stored data), and protection against harmful results because of participation were addressed. Participating family members signed an information and consent form, a data and transcript release form and a sign-off release form (see Appendix D).

Limitations

The following were potential conditions and restrictions that came to bear on this study:

1. The data collection and analysis that was conducted was carried out by a single researcher using guiding questions. The researcher needed to be aware

of his personal biases and subjectivity (e.g. my view of how a family should function and allowing my own perceptions to influence how the interviewee should interpret their experience) and how those two factors could potentially impact the accuracy of the family narrative.

2. The research was confined to the experiences of one family selected who fit the criteria for this study. This select family was also Caucasian and did not have female children. Because of the qualitative nature of this study, the context in which it took place, and its small purposefully selected sample, the resulting data was not statistically generalizable to other school settings or other families (e.g. those of aboriginal descent, those with a blend of male and female children and single parent families) who have participated in the F&ST program.
3. Because of the potential weakness in the literacy ability of participating family members, establishing trustworthiness of interview transcripts was a possible challenge. Consequently, assistance was provided as needed by the researcher in reading back the individual interview transcript to the relevant participant.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Overview

Pridmore (2002) states that much concern has been shown over the last few years regarding the stressors experienced by the nuclear family; these stressors include rising rates of divorce, and an uncertain economic and political climate. According to McDonald and Frey (1999), Pridmore (2002) and F&ST Canada (2006), parents under stress may experience difficulty in providing for their children's emotional well-being and scholastic success - factors that can lead to school failure, delinquency and substance abuse in youth. Consequently, the goals of FAST U.S.A. and F&ST Canada are to: increase children's feelings of affiliation toward their schools and families; increase parents' feelings of control over their homes, children and life circumstances; increase positive and responsive interactions within families and toward children, and increase support networks of families of high-risk students in relationship to the school (Hernandez, 2002).

Since its inception in the United States and Canada, Hernandez (2002), McDonald and Frey (1999) and F&ST Canada (2006) state that the Family and Schools Together intervention program has made a positive impact in the lives of individual family members and in family units as a whole. In Hernandez (2002), a former graduate of the program states:

It's brought my kids and me closer together to do more things together, even if we just walk to the Dairy Queen and get an ice cream and sit there for a little while. We look forward to doing something every day at least 1 hour. I was always stuck doing the novela (soap opera). Now, after the novela's over I say, "Let's

play”, you know games and we spend that time together. I feel sorry for the people who haven’t been to FAST. They taught us how to communicate in FAST because we do the charade cards and expressions. So sometimes when I’m mad I want them to still approach me, I need to leave that line open to them. So sometimes when I’m like real angry, I gotta remember don’t put on that face, calm down and remember the facial expression, ‘cause if I’m walking around like this I will not get approached. (p. 4)

This graduate goes on to say:

My son lived with my mother. I started going to FAST on night three. He did not want to sit with me, so I asked him to do special play with me and at first he was like, “Do I have to?” and I told him, “It’s up to you”. And so he did. By the end, he was right up next to me, getting my plate. A couple of months after he came to live with me. Before, I just thought they needed somebody and I thought my mom could do it all. I never realized how important it was – you know that what they wanted was me. (p. 4)

In this chapter, the reader will find the stories of three children – Chad, Armand, and Jason – and their two parents – Melissa and Mark. These stories tell of their individual experiences as participants in the F&ST program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. All italicized texts within the stories are direct quotations from the interviews and are the words each member has chosen to describe each of their own experiences from their own perspective.

Chad's Story

Small town living can, in some ways, be like traveling back in time to an era where life was less complicated, less stressed, where everyone knew his or her neighbor, and children could enjoy a game of ball at the park or walk to school without fear for their safety (Melchior, 2008). In this small, rural Northwestern Saskatchewan community, being involved in community activities and having a network of friends can play an important role in helping a young person feel accepted and valued by those around him or her.

For a young boy who has difficulty fitting in, the rural town may present some challenges. There are a few hangouts but for the child who is insecure, feeling accepted is not always easy. The stresses of peer pressure present many challenges to a boy searching to find his own identity.

Chad is one such boy. He is a grade three student at a local school, the youngest of three children who reside with their biological parents. Sadly, his life is in many ways typical of a nuclear family; his dad works long hours and is often absent from his children's lives, and his mom tries to spend uninterrupted time with her children but admits that it is often difficult to do so. Chad's older brothers frequently tend to go their own ways, and get caught up in their own interests, hobbies, and achievements.

Chad may have been described as a child at risk, anxious, a loner, a child on the outside looking in, not sure of where he belonged or how to get there. He had little interest in community life, organized sports, clubs, or community events. He repeated grade one, presented with delays in articulation, reading comprehension and attention. In addition, Chad struggled with concentrating on his work and has had medical issues.

These medical issues (i.e. vision difficulties and appendicitis) have caused him to miss a portion of his primary schooling. Like many ten year old boys, interest in homework has been low on Chad's list of priorities.

Many children, including Chad, are at risk to be marginalized in our schools. These children may include the poor, the physically and mentally weak, and the ones that differ from the norm. Children at risk can also include: youth in poverty, youth in stress, homeless youth, abused and neglected youth, youth with eating disorders, chemically abusive youth, sexually active youth, and homosexual youth. In addition, children at risk can include: youth with sexually transmitted diseases, pregnant youth and young parents, delinquent youth, youth in gangs, drop outs, suicidal youth, overemployed youth, mentally ill youth, disabled and handicapped youth, and lonely and disengaged youth (Lang & Evans, 2006).

When the idea of attending Families and Schools Together (F&ST) as an eight week activity was presented to Chad, he welcomed the idea of attending and enrolling his family. The idea of spending time with his family, having meals together, singing songs, and playing games were all intriguing thoughts, although somewhat anxiety-provoking for this shy and seemingly lonely child.

His first evening with the group went as Chad had secretly hoped. He got to socialize with some school friends while his parents mingled with other adults of similar age and status. Chad felt good to see his teachers there, as he later recollected. He was particularly impressed at being able to call the teachers by their first names.

I got to know their first names because I wanted to learn their first names. It made me feel more comfortable being around my teachers after working with them at

F&ST because I like the teachers. I always was talking with them when there was a space in between stuff because my mom let me go talk, but not to run - just walk around to talk with the other teachers, because I wanted to know more about them. They were good to talk to and I learned what they like to eat and stuff and Mr. Williams likes pizza and that's why I made pizzas for supper.

Chad began to identify with his teachers in a unique way. He was like an insider now, feeling proud to have broken the ice. For a boy who was used to being on the outside, feeling a sense of acceptance without judgment was special and it made him feel special, too. For a ten year old boy it was a good feeling - a feeling he wanted more of. Positive experiences are absolutely necessary for every child to feel proud of his accomplishments, act independently, feel confident, and be willing to respond to his educational setting with spontaneity (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 1998; F&ST Canada, 2006; FAST, 2006).

Educators need to be involved in students' lives through such things as extracurricular activities. These relationships and interactions allow the child's self-esteem to flourish and allow him to seek, define and develop his own knowledge about truth and values that work for him. Having teachers involved in F&ST also acts as a catalyst for connection between the child, the child's family, and the child's school. Having this connection is important because it is one of the critical factors associated with a youth staying out of trouble and with decreasing incidences of academic failure (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Resnick et al., 1997). Teachers cannot work alone to develop this critical connection between home and school, however. To expect so would be unrealistic. Teachers need the support of parents, the community, the board of education,

and society itself. Educators must also realize that the family can help teachers in their educational efforts.

F&ST views the family as the program's core focus (F&ST Canada, 1996). Chad began to identify more with his dad, he was able to experience some uninterrupted dad time, laughing, playing, and spending time with one another. It wasn't so much what they did together but the fact that they were together as friends, as partners, as a boy and a dad. Chad felt comfortable during these times. These times helped Chad to feel special and helped build his relationship with his father. The pride in Chad's voice is illustrated as he reflects on those times:

I mostly went with my dad [to one-on-one play time] because my mom mostly went to parent time. I liked it [one-on-one play time] because I got to spend uninterrupted time with my dad without my brother bugging me. We got to play with the bags that have stuff in it. You can build and you can pretend stuff and we could sit in the tepee too and play.

As Chad's self-esteem developed, his social skills emerged as though they were now given permission to flourish. Each of us relies upon the reflection of our own behaviour as mirrored in the faces, words and reactions of those around us of what is right and wrong in our own behaviour (Reuben, 1994). Being at school was more fun now. Chad felt comfortable and accepted in ways that only he could explain:

I got to learn to be respectful, how to get along with others, and not to bully other people. I kinda like school and I kinda don't, but it made me like school more because you're always at the school. We get to play in the gym because I didn't like to play in the gym before - now I do.

Teaching social skills can bring significant rewards. The power of any type of cooperative structure is that it allows students to work together to accomplish goals and create collaborative learning communities (Olson, Platt & Dieker, 2008). Learning to cooperate and positively interact with others is a critical skill. Mel Levine writes passionately about the teaching of social skills when he states that even the most brilliant child can end up frustrated if he is too shy, socially inept, or antisocial. Levine goes on to say that school affords little or no privacy; consequently, those who have underdeveloped social skills are more likely to feel the pain of exposure and daily humiliation. They are likely to be the most downtrodden students in a school and also the most distressed on the job (Levine, 2002).

Chad also developed a new enjoyment in his family as a whole. Even his older brothers seemed less threatening and bothersome. The family unit was becoming unified as the weekly sessions continued. Chad and his family never missed a session as they cooked meals, presented food, joined in with the chants and shared the chats. It was as though something unique was being created, something that was there all along but now felt new, different and exciting. The family unit was given a chance to work together; Chad discovered that his family can have fun together. He described their meal preparation with great enthusiasm:

We got to put one thing of each what we wanted into it [the pizzas] and make one that we wanted. I wanted lasagna, but my mom never made it because it would take too long to cook because the noodles would be hard. We made little pizzas that I liked. We made them at home and brought them to F&ST. It was fun, because I learned the family can work together and now I know we can.

Families naturally feel a benefit from being a unit (Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). This family unity is particularly emphasized in the F&ST program when each family wins the Fixed Lottery. Winning is celebrated loudly by all those in attendance. The family whose name is drawn wins a prize and as a result of this win, is responsible for creating the meal for the next F&ST night.

As for his brothers:

I learned that I could be nice to other people. I could talk to my parents and brothers more all the time. I felt I couldn't before. Always being by them at F&ST helped me learn that I can talk more freely to my family. I communicated with them a lot at F&ST and that helped me.

From Chad's insight, professionals can understand the value of prosocial activities for children. Structured play activities teach many skills such as tolerance, belonging, learning to win and accepting a loss. Cooperative learning is an example of humanistic teaching and learning. It promotes children's social and emotional, as well as intellectual, growth in an environment characterized by sharing, acceptance, respect, and mutual support (Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf, 2006).

When F&ST came to the end of its eighth week, Chad felt sad and disappointed, and yet, this young boy was amazingly reflective. In some ways the very things that made him feel so nervous just eight short weeks ago had now become a part of his life, a part of his identity.

I was very sad because I liked it [F&ST] but we did get to go into a smaller thing called F&STWORKS and that's what I'm in now. F&STWORKS is like F&ST but Cally, she makes the supper for us. We met every other week and go to other

places like the bowling alley and the big hill to sled, but we have to bring our own stuff (sled etc.) for that.

Chad looked back on those eight weeks as some of the most important in his young life. Eight weeks, a short time span, had given a young boy a new reality filled with hope, new friends, and new dreams.

It helps you learn how to get along with other people who are in F&ST with you. I didn't know one boy, but I did after. I got to learn his name and he told me all about himself and I am still friends with him. F&ST helped me meet new people and make new friends because I like to have new friends.

Today, Chad still struggles academically in some subject areas but his attitude toward school is brighter. He is a seemingly happier, more contented child who has begun to find his way. He recommends F&ST without reservation and describes it by saying:

I would say that you get to play fun games in the gym, do charades and decorate a flag that you have put your name on, like your last name, so that people know where you sit and stuff.

In conclusion, Chad was considered an at-risk child for a number of reasons: he found it challenging to fit in with his peers, he struggled academically at school, he was left out of activities planned by his brothers and he felt disconnected from his parents – particularly his father. Chad did not have a strong affiliation with his school and he did not express interest in being involved with activities in his community. He also did not have a strong, supportive network of peers that he could turn to outside of the home.

According to research, these factors can place a young person at risk for delinquency and academic failure (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Chad's participation in F&ST has helped establish protective factors in and around Chad to help buffer him against negative outcomes and minimize at-risk factors. Intrinsically, F&ST has enabled Chad to develop the confidence, self-esteem and social skills needed to approach and dialogue with his teachers and parents as well as establish and maintain a protective social network of peers. Because of this, he has experienced acceptance from both adults and people of his own age. He has also developed a connection with his community through friendships made while at F&ST. Extrinsically, F&ST activities have helped promote healthy communication patterns, and positive family relationships especially between Chad and his father and promoted a healthy link between Chad and his teachers. It has also helped Chad learn to appreciate how his behavior can impact others around him. Overall, F&ST has proven to be a significant ingredient in helping break at-risk patterns experienced by Chad.

Armand's Story

For most adolescent children in this Northwestern Saskatchewan community, there are many opportunities to get involved with activities outside of the home. Each season brings with it accompanying opportunities for fun and adventure ranging from knee-boarding on one of the local lakes to playing hockey at the neighborhood arena. For adolescents not inclined toward sports there is a myriad of clubs and organizations that offer a wide variety of activities to meet the interests of a discerning audience. Not only do these clubs and organizations offer the opportunity for a young person to pursue something of interest they also fulfill a deep need to feel connected and affiliated with other peers. Adolescence is a period when young people desire to spend much time talking and doing activities with each other. Peers play an important role in an adolescent's life and provide the opportunity to explore different identities, social ideas and the nature of relationships (Child & Family Canada, 2000; Stanton, 2001).

For an adolescent who may not share the same interest in activities as some of his peers or is at a different level of social development, connecting with peers may pose some challenges. These differences may limit the type of activity or the group of people with whom a young boy feels at ease. Armand is one such boy. His favorite activities include hunting with his uncle and twin brother and attending Air Cadets.

Armand recounted that even though his parents shared the same interest in Air Cadets as he did, Armand and his parents did not communicate on a level that allowed him to express his innermost feelings and how the actions of his other family members affected him. Adolescence has been described as a phase that can be unstable and conflictual with a gradual movement by the young person towards autonomy and

independence (Stanton, 2001). Parents who show higher levels of interest and understanding of their teen have been shown to have a greater influence in helping buffer their adolescent against making poor choices (Child & Family Canada, 2000; Stanton, 2001).

Armand is a grade nine student at a local junior high school, the oldest of three children who reside with their biological parents; he is also a twin to his brother, Jason. Because they are twins, Armand and his brother Jason don't experience the tensions that are almost inevitable between siblings separated by a year or more. There is no older child to feel angry at being displaced from the special position of "only" or "baby." And there is no younger sibling to feel that he is always slower, weaker and less clever, and thus has to work harder to catch up. It follows that twin relationships are often unusually close and harmonious (Heffner, 2006; Needlman, 2004). Because of the connection between Armand and Jason, Armand's relationship is not as well established with his younger brother, Chad. That weaker relationship can be the source of some tension between the two.

Armand is an average student who can be described as a tall, 14 year old boy who is at times shy and introverted, but outgoing and sociable when in situations or environments where he feels comfortable. Through his youngest brother and parents, the idea of attending F&ST was presented to Armand; his immediate response was that "*it would be something different to try and that it would be fun.*" He was not at all hesitant to get involved. The idea that being involved in this program might help Armand get to know his brothers and parents better, enable him to meet new friends and try new activities was an opportunity he didn't want to miss. Armand reflected, "*I might get to*

know my brothers and parents more and who knows, I might meet a couple of younger kids and I might get to know them more.” F&ST is designed to minimize social isolation, to improve family relationships and build stronger family bonds (F&ST Canada, 2006).

Armand was in grade seven and attending the local junior high school when the opportunity to attend F&ST was given. F&ST meetings were held in his younger brother’s school – the same school Armand attended during his elementary school years. When the time came for the initial meeting of F&ST, Armand was unable to attend. He did, however, ensure that he was able to attend the following meetings over the next seven weeks. He was looking forward to all of the activities he had been told about and was particularly looking forward to meeting some new friends.

I wasn’t there the very first night, but the next couple I was. I wasn’t really nervous and I was looking forward to the games because of the physical activity. I also met some people that I had seen around but never really talked to and I got to know some of the newer teachers.

Meeting new peers and teachers was a highlight for Armand. He recounted that having the teachers participating in F&ST was a good idea - *“it gets us to know the teachers and the teachers to know the kids better, then some of the family gets to know the teachers, too.”* Armand felt that by getting to know the teachers and the teachers getting to know his family members would help around teacher interview time as well. This relationship would be helpful because it would enable the teachers and parents to have a better understanding of each other. Armand reflected, *“It would enable them to be on the same page.”* Having this connection between the individual, the individual’s

family and the school is important because this relationship is one of the critical factors associated with a youth staying out of trouble and with decreasing incidences of academic failure (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Resnick et al., 1997).

In addition, Armand recounted that this connection between home and school was important to him personally because it helped him feel more at ease with going to one of the teachers in other situations, and feel comfortable talking with them. In his words, *“If the kids are having problems at school, the kids can bring it to the teachers a lot easier.”* It has been found that having just one positive, long-term relationship with a significant other (e.g. parent, teacher, or community member) provides the protective factors of feeling loved and being able to talk and confide about difficult and stressful issues (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Armand also enjoyed the opportunity to be introduced to new peers through organized gym activities and craft time. He recounted that after having met new friends at F&ST, especially older children, he had more friends to talk to at his school. Armand reflected that by getting to know children who were two grades ahead of him, *“it would make it easier for when the time came for him to go to high school”* – the older children he met at F&ST would already be at Armand’s new high school and would therefore make his transition to his new school much easier.

You have older kids that you know for when you go to the high school and stuff so that you have someone to talk to and that, other than idiots in your class. You can meet older kids and it makes the transition to high school better. When I was in FAST I was in grade 7 and they were in grade 9 so they were two grades ahead of me so when I go to the high school I will be able to recognize some faces.

F&ST builds and enhances long-term relationships to provide youth a social safety net of protective factors for getting through difficult times (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Getting to know his parents and his brothers on a deeper level was one of the most enticing aspects of F&ST that initially perked Armand's interest to get involved with the program. Activities such as Feelings Charades and Scribbles were two events that helped Armand draw closer to his family members. Both activities promote sharing between family members in the context of fun and mutual support (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Armand recounted that Feelings Charades in particular not only helped him to communicate more openly with his family members, but also helped his parents and brothers gain a better understanding of how he felt about them. In addition to that, Armand learned how his parents and brothers were feeling toward him.

They had these different feelings on this wall and you had to pick one and then mime it out to your family and you could do quite a bit for it like hand gestures and actually start to cry if we were sad and that. It kinda got my parents knowing how I felt about them and stuff and I kinda got to know what my parents were going through. It also helped with communication because it got my parents to kinda talk to us more and that we could talk back to them - you have to take turns and you can't really yell.

As illustrated by Armand, F&ST attempts to reduce social isolation often experienced by children and their families by promoting involvement in each other's lives (F&ST Canada, 2006).

As Armand looked back on those eight weeks of F&ST, he realized the value he gained from participating in such a program. It was different than programs offered by

clubs and organizations in the community – even from Air Cadets. Armand enjoyed Air Cadets. Like most clubs, Air Cadets offered many interesting activities and provided the opportunity to do something with his twin brother and his parents. The prominent difference between F&ST and other clubs, however, is that F&ST involves the whole family and the activities are focused on building stronger family bonds (F&ST Canada, 2006).

As for Armand's relationship with his brothers:

It makes my brothers a lot better that they can't pick on me as much any more. My twin, he gets mad at me sometimes and he kinda knows how I'll react. The same with my little brother when he goes into my stuff he'll somewhat know how I'll react. It [F&ST] kinda helped me be more aware of how they felt about different things.

Armand reflects that not only has it helped him be more aware of how he and his brothers interact with each other, but Armand's involvement in F&ST also helped improve his relationship with his parents. Armand recounts that Feelings Charades and Scribbles played a large part in helping him and his parents learn to communicate with each other in a positive and productive way. He feels he has become more respectful of them as his parents and more understanding of the issues they face as they raise two teenage boys.

It [F&ST] helped me in my relationship with my parents in that it helped me be more aware of what they were going through raising teenagers, that I can't always do what I want to do and always get what I want. If you have

communication it will help you talk more freely to your parents instead of trying to hide every little detail. It [F&ST] has helped my family all way 'round.

Today, Armand recommends F&ST to other families without reservation and describes it by saying:

It [F&ST] also brings a happier environment for the students in that they have something to do after school rather than fooling around and getting into trouble. It also helps to get older brothers and sisters to come away from their friends to see how they are without their friends.

In conclusion, even though Armand was not selected by the school as the target at-risk child, there were some factors in place that put him at potential risk of delinquent behaviour. From Armand's perspective, he did not have open communication with his parents or siblings; he felt limited in the ability to express his feelings about how his family member's actions were affecting him. He was also disconnected from his younger brother and struggled to fit in with his peers at school.

Armand did experience positive outcomes as a result of participating in the F&ST program. Specifically, Armand experienced a closer relationship to his parents and siblings and felt that he could communicate with them more openly and positively than before; Armand also began to understand his parent's and sibling's feelings toward him. Armand learned the importance of cooperation and taking the time to listen to his family members' perspective on issues. He discovered that there were other peers in his community with similar interests - friends he could interact with, turn to for support especially while transitioning into his new high school. Armand also developed a

comfort level with teachers that enabled him to be at ease in approaching them to discuss challenges he may be experiencing inside and outside of school.

Without the opportunity to participate in the F&ST intervention program, the changes that Armand did experience, both as an individual and as a member of his family, may have been delayed or not realized at all. F&ST has helped establish practices that Armand and his family can use to help buffer Armand against negative outcomes.

Jason's Story

Jason, like his twin brother Armand, does not share some of the same interests as his peers. Jason reflected, "*Some of the things those other guys do is dumb.*" Jason does enjoy spending time hunting with his uncle and older brother, attending Air Cadets and delivering newspapers with Armand. According to Brofenbrenner and Morris (1998), limiting the number of positive experiences a young person has to a few select settings reduces the number of sources that can provide protective factors that buffer against child delinquency.

Jason is a grade nine student attending the same local junior high school as his twin brother Armand, and is the second oldest of three children who reside with their biological parents. Even though Jason and his twin brother share some common interests, Jason is a unique individual in his own right, with his own distinctive personality. Armand is a quiet individual and inclined to take the role as leader while Jason is an out-going individual who takes the role of follower. Twins are often an interesting mix of competitor and companion. Some research shows that the firstborn often takes the assertive role of leader while the second-born follows along (Leman, 1985). Because adolescents generally have an intense desire to belong, having a tendency to be a follower can put a young person at risk for making unhealthy choices. It has been shown that the need for acceptance is as strong as biological drives (Stanton, 2001).

Jason recounted that because he is twin to Armand, his younger brother Chad sometimes gets left out of activities Jason and his older brother enjoy, leaving Chad to fend for himself. Excluding Chad sometimes creates friction between Jason and his

younger brother. According to Leman (1985) twins can contribute to the isolation of additional siblings by unconsciously or consciously excluding them from activities.

Jason is an average student described as a sociable and friendly 14 year old boy, who, at the age of 12, didn't care about school and "*thought it was a waste of time*"; he admitted that he didn't feel particularly connected with his school. McDonald and Frey (1999) state that positive affiliation to the school by the child when combined with parental involvement in their child's education bodes well for academic success.

Through his two brothers and his parents, the idea of attending F&ST was presented to Jason; his immediate response was, "*I thought it would be real stupid and wouldn't have fun.*" He reflected that he thought participating in F&ST would be likened to going to a guidance counsellor to talk about your problems. Jason recounted that he was "*quite hesitant*" about participating in the program, but his parents "*made me, so I went.*" After giving more thought to what he was told about F&ST, Jason stated that he did get a little excited about the possibility of developing a better relationship with each of his family members and seeing how other families got along with each other. In Jason's words, "*I was looking forward to F&ST helping me get a better relationship with my family members.*"

As Armand, Jason was in grade seven and attending the local junior high school when the opportunity to attend F&ST at his younger brother's school was presented. When the time arrived for the first F&ST meeting, Jason, who does not see himself as one to withdraw from other people or new experiences, was somewhat apprehensive. He recounts, "*I felt a little shy – usually I'm not feeling shy at all and that. It was all the other families and people I didn't know.*"

Meeting new peers and interacting with them during games and craft time played a significant role in Jason's overcoming his nervousness about attending F&ST. He recalled:

I started to get over my shyness the first night and it would have to be when I interacted with all the other kids through games we played and the craft time – helping the younger kids with the crafts. I got involved in the activities and helped them. By the end of the first night I felt a lot better than being shy at the beginning.

One of F&ST's goals is to promote the building and maintaining of peer relationships that provide youth a social safety net of protective factors for getting through tough times (McDonald & Frey, 1999). Jason admitted that he enjoys being active and states that he did volunteer some of his time to help the younger children with crafts, but what he enjoyed most was, "*it [volunteering] was a great opportunity to get to know some of the other kids*".

One of the purposes of having staff involved with F&ST is to promote a meaningful connection between young people and the school setting (F&ST, 2006). Jason recounts that having the teachers at F&ST was a highlight for him and thought the idea of having them there was "*awesome*." In retrospect, Jason stated that getting to know and interacting with the teachers at F&ST enabled him to develop skills that helped him relate better to the teachers he had at the junior high school. Jason found that by having teachers take part in the games and being able to help some of the teachers with craft time, he was able to build a trust with them that will make it much easier for him to

go to those teachers and talk with them about any problems he may have outside of F&ST.

I would feel comfortable being able to phone them up and try to make a meeting with them cause I would feel comfortable doing it cause I can actually sit down and talk to somebody I can trust.

Before the F&ST program, school was not something that Jason really cared much about. Jason reflected, “*In the beginning, I didn’t really care. I thought it (school) was a waste of time a little bit and I didn’t want to do my homework because I thought it was boring.*” After being in F&ST, however, and experiencing some of the activities at his new school that come with being in a higher grade, his feelings about school began to change. He found that interacting with the teachers at F&ST influenced his attitude toward school – it was no longer a waste of time and he made more of an effort to keep up with his homework.

My feelings about school began to change a little bit. It [F&ST] actually got me doing my homework more and have a better attitude toward school and that it wasn’t a waste of time. I think my feelings about school changed because of interacting with the teachers who were at F&ST.

F&ST promotes parental involvement in the education of their children (McDonald & Frey, 1999). In retrospect, Jason thought that getting to know the teachers not only helped him, but his parents and family as well. In his view, F&ST helped his family get more involved with the school.

It helps families get more involved in their school and it helps you get to know the teachers a little bit better so that you’re not always fighting with the teachers over

there and that. I think it's really positive to get to know your teachers so you know what they're into and how you can interact with them outside of school and it helps the parents in that it would help them get closer so they know them a little better so they don't always have to fight with them over little things like being misdiagnosed with something.

Building and developing a deeper relationship with his parents and his brothers was a goal that Jason hoped to realize by attending F&ST. Activities such as Family Meal, Scribbles, Feelings Charades and Kids' Play were some of the events that helped Jason draw closer to his family members. These activities help promote sharing between family members in the context of fun and mutual support as well as build feelings of mutual and shared responsibilities (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Jason recounted that Scribbles, Feelings Charades and the Family Meal enabled him and his family to communicate to each other what they were thinking or feeling. He stated that through these kinds of activities he learned to communicate with his parents and brothers in a more positive manner. The impact has been that *"we don't fight as much and we take more time to talk with each other about things and sometimes about how we can improve things as a family."* According to Jason, Kids' Play helped him learn that it was fun to take time and sit down with each other, not only with other kids but with his brothers, and not fight over whose turn it is. He realized that he could have fun doing something with his brothers and could work with them as a team.

I also started to feel closer to my family [in particular his brothers] through the group work with the family. Like when we had to guess each other's pictures and the supper where we actually sit down and we actually talk more than we do when

we're at home 'cause we're always sometimes running all over. I felt closer to the other kids and my brothers.

As Jason looked back on those eight weeks of F&ST, he realized the value he gained from participating in such a program. Jason's attitude toward school improved, he became more cognizant of how he relates to his brothers and parents, and his parents took more time to do things with him and his brothers by playing games with them or sitting down and enjoying a movie together. Jason recounts:

It [F&ST] has helped 'cause we [Jason and his parents] don't fight as much as we used to because it would have to be when we sit down as a family eating or at the end when we just talked for a while. We talk about how we could improve what we do as a family and how we could improve not fighting and that. It has helped my relationship with my parents 'cause they get more active with us [Jason and his brothers] by playing games with us or sitting down and actually watching a movie with us. When we cooked the family meal it was fun because we actually had to go along with what each other was saying and how to do it properly. Everyone was working at the same time and I learned that we can work together as a group if you listen to what each other has to say.

Today, Jason also recommends F&ST to other families without reservation and describes it by saying:

F&ST is a program that helps families get over their differences and it helps you get closer to other family members and helps you interact with other families. It helps families get along with each other and to help you get more active with each other.

In conclusion, like Armand, Jason was not identified as a target, at-risk child by the hosting school; however, Jason was a second born twin with a tendency to be a follower, who sensed a disconnection with his family and viewed school as a waste of time; according to McDonald & Frey (1999), these factors do have the potential of placing a child at risk.

As a result of being an active participant in the F&ST program, Jason was empowered to openly and positively communicate with his parents and peers, he was able to develop a positive view of school and teachers through interactions with school staff at F&ST, and he was able to experience a connectedness with his parents and siblings on a level he had not had before. Jason was also provided the opportunity to establish a new network of friends he could be socially connected with outside of F&ST and be active in helping other children in his community through volunteerism.

By helping promote protective factors such as belonging and acceptance within the family, an attitude of service, open communication, and a positive attitude toward school and teachers, F&ST has established positive attitudes and patterns within Jason and his family that will help buffer Jason from feeling isolated from his family, school and teachers as well as assist him in making wise choices.

Melissa's Story

According to Pleck (1984), two people working together to make decisions are better than one – this can be no truer than in raising children and helping them safely navigate their way from childhood to adulthood. A child who has both a mother and a father can benefit from an increased richness of care. A mother and father who can count on each other to share the responsibilities of caring for their children and support one another in the running of the home will be happier and more effective parents (Pleck, 1984).

For a mother with a husband working shifts that interfere with his family time, who has children who clamor for her attention in the absence of their father, who desires to have quality time with each of her children but feels overextended, who wants to stay connected with her children by volunteering in their schools and who feels at times that she is managing the family alone, life can be overwhelming. Melissa is one such mother.

Melissa was made aware of the F&ST program being offered at Chad's school through her youngest son Chad, and through the monthly school newsletter. She had not previously heard of the F&ST program, but took notice of Chad's excitement about the possibility of attending it. After doing some investigation of her own through discussions with a F&ST leader and reading literature about the program, Melissa recalled, "*It sounded like it would be interesting and well, I volunteer at the school so much it was something to do at the school and we thought we'd try it to see what it was like.*"

Melissa was already an active volunteer in her youngest son's school when the opportunity to attend F&ST was provided; she had some familiarity with school staff and knew her way around the school building quite well. However, when the time came to

attend the first F&ST meeting, Melissa admitted that she was somewhat nervous. Because her husband Mark was busy with work and could not attend F&ST meetings on a regular basis, Melissa was usually left as the attending parent. Without Mark there, Melissa had to face this seemingly intimidating situation alone. Melissa recalled that she was not sure what was going to be expected of her at the meeting. Her greatest fear was being asked to speak in front of the other participants while introducing her family members. Over the course of the next few meetings, however, Melissa was able to cope with her uneasiness by having her children take turns introducing their family members.

Having teachers involved as leaders at F&ST was a “*great idea*” in Melissa’s opinion, because it helped her get to know staff members on a deeper level as people outside of their teacher role. As a result, Melissa reflected:

It’s easier to go talk to them [the teachers] if you know the teachers a little bit more. If you’re having problems, or if you’re concerned about something, you know the teachers better and it’s easier to go to them as a parent.

Through these informal connections between school staff and parents, parents have reported an increased involvement in their child’s education and in their child’s school (F&ST Canada, 2006; McDonald & Frey, 1999). One of the goals of F&ST is to promote a positive connection between parents and their child’s school as a protective factor in buffering children against school failure (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

In addition to promoting a constructive affiliation between the parent and the school, F&ST also promotes a positive association between the child and the child’s school. This affiliation has been shown to buffer children against delinquency (Hawkins,

1996). Not only did Melissa view having teaching staff at F&ST as an important component for her, she reflected that it benefitted her children as well. She recounted:

We had one issue that the kids [the two older boys] had to go and talk to Mr. Johnson once they were already over at the junior high. I think part of that comes from F&ST because they got to know the teachers differently with them being in junior high. It got to the point that they wanted to go back more after we had been in F&ST.

F&ST encourages community members to become involved as F&ST volunteers to promote the connection between families and their community. Though the family has been identified as the primary influence on children and primary source of protective factors against delinquency and poor performance at school, other settings outside of the home – namely community organizations – also play a role in providing those protective factors (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Melissa stated that her involvement in the program did not specifically help her to connect with formal organizations in her community; however, she did express that F&ST helped her to establish supportive relationships with other families. In Melissa’s opinion “*By getting to know new faces it did help, to a certain extent, develop a stronger and more extensive support network.*”

Life is busy for Melissa as a mother of three adolescent boys. There were times that she felt things were too hectic for her and her family. They seemed to be always going here and there, and finding it hard to actually connect and spend time together. In Melissa’s words, “*As parents we get spread too thin and you forget to take that time with your family.*” Studies have shown that the bond between children and parents or caregivers is a critical factor in reducing behavior problems in youth (Wisconsin Center

for Educational Research, 2006). According to Melissa, F&ST provided opportunities to connect not only with other families, but with her immediate family members as well.

Like a lot of times we were going every direction. We still go in every direction, but we actually could do something as a family and everybody was welcome. That was the nice thing about it [F&ST] – it was kind of a connecting point for everybody.

Having the opportunity to connect with her family was a significant draw for Melissa to the F&ST program. Activities such as Scribbles, Feelings Charades and the Family Meal helped Melissa gain a sense of connection with her family that she had been missing. Melissa recounted that it was important to her to do something together as a family unit, because her family was sometimes so busy at home going in separate directions that, as a family, they found it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to connect with each other on a regular basis. One of the most important lessons Melissa learned about herself was that she realized how important it was for her to just slow down and take time for her family. Melissa recalled that *“the kids grow up too fast. The older boys will be in high school next year. It’s crazy! Stop and take time for the family and not be on the go all of the time.”*

In retrospect, Melissa recalled that the planned time with family at F&ST also taught her the importance of taking the time to listen to her children and her husband – to hear the things that are important to them and the activities that they would like to do – interests and things of importance that, according to Melissa, people sometimes forget about. Presently, Melissa and her husband are making a conscious effort to find ways to maintain the connectedness developed through F&ST by actively listening to what their

children's interests and desires are and trying to incorporate those into family activities.

Melissa reflects:

Listen to what your kids say or want to do. Sometimes I think we forget that. With F&ST and F&STWORKS you learn to ask your kids what they'd like to do and then try to incorporate it in as a family. We did try this summer and we're planning a trip to B.C. next summer. The kids are excited to go.

Melissa did reflect that there were times that she felt alone in her efforts to raise their children and at the same manage the daily responsibilities around the home. She often felt isolated from others. Over time, social isolation undercuts the effectiveness of parenting (Egeland, Breitenbycher & Rosenberg, 1980); in response, F&ST promotes opportunity for parents to connect with other parents (FAST, 2006). To Melissa, Parent Time enabled her to be exposed to perspectives from a variety of people on topics such as parenting approaches. She also found that it was a great opportunity to connect with people who may have been experiencing the same challenges as her and to learn from them how they were working through those challenges.

It [Parent Time] was just interesting to hear the different perspectives – just to hear what other people were doing and I would get different ideas from different parents how to work with your kids with homework and how different people deal with different things. It is helpful because maybe you're having the same problem as somebody else and you can hear different people's perspectives of how to work through those problems too. It [F&ST] helped me to have patience with the kids more and it did help me to be more understanding of Chad – I had a lot of issues

with him. The Parent Time taught me a little more patience and to try different approaches.

Today, Melissa recommends F&ST without reservation and describes it by saying:

It [F&ST] is a lot of fun, you get to meet new people, the kids and parents get to see a different view of teachers outside of their teaching role and it doesn't matter who you are – everyone who attends is on a level playing field. It brings different people together – not necessarily someone you'd have coffee with, but you're all mixed together. Sometimes I think in our society we don't do that.

Melissa, her husband and their three children are presently involved in F&STWORKS, a two year follow-up support program for graduates of the FAST program.

Melissa recounted that her involvement as a participant in F&ST has enabled her to be more conscious of the importance of slowing down, taking time for her family and setting family time as a priority; Melissa has also recognized that she has become more patient with her youngest son, Chad. Melissa has discovered that there is a network of support available to her in her efforts to raise her children – she does not need to feel alone in her parenting role. This support has come through other families Melissa met through the F&ST program. Melissa has also become more aware of the importance of and more comfortable with working as a team with teachers in the education of her children.

In conclusion, Melissa came into the F&ST program as a mother who felt isolated in raising her children, and who found it difficult to spend quality time with her family because of the busy schedule at home. Without access to informal and or formal

supports, these factors have been shown to contribute to dysfunction in the home (Egeland, Breitenbycher & Rosenberg, 1980). F&ST has introduced Melissa to these supports and has provided the setting in which Melissa can spend quality, uninterrupted time with her family. The protective factor of peer support has helped Melissa develop a network of parents to draw on for emotional support and parenting ideas which has helped buffer Melissa against social isolation. F&ST activities that promote connections and healthy communication among Melissa and her family members have helped Melissa not only develop more patience and understanding of her children and husband, but have also taught her the value of slowing down and taking time for her family. These activities have also acted as a buffer for her children by providing a setting in which Melissa's children can have meaningful interaction with a significant adult - namely the child's parent. Through participation in F&ST, Melissa has grown to realize she is not alone in her parenting efforts and has developed a renewed view of the kind of priority family time deserves over other activities.

Mark's Story

In the past, psychologists studying the development of children focused almost exclusively on children's relationships with their mothers; however, it has been realized that fathers play a unique and crucial role in nurturing and guiding their children's intellectual and social development (Civitas, 2008). Although teenagers rely more upon their mothers for emotional support, the relationship with fathers continues to be important. Teenagers rely more upon their fathers for conversation, advice and just being there (Catan, Dennison & Coleman, 1997). Adolescents who felt their fathers were available to them had fewer conflicts with their friends (Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewica, 1999).

Unfortunately, some fathers are not available to their children. Whether this is due to the father's concern for building independence in his children, or due to changes, work demands and stresses he is experiencing in his own life, a reduction in a father's availability and guidance during his children's adolescence can have negative consequences by putting his children at risk for delinquency (Amato, 1986; FAST, 2006).

For a father whose work demands get in the way of spending time with his family, who feels stretched and tired trying to make up lost time with his children, who feels constantly on the go trying to meet the needs of work and home, and who struggles with guilt about not being able to contribute at home or be available to his children to the extent he would like, life can be challenging. Mark is one such father.

Like his wife Melissa, Mark was not aware of F&ST – it was something completely new to him. The first time he had ever heard anything about it was through his youngest son Chad. Through reading about F&ST in the school newsletter, listening

to his youngest son and considering the feedback his wife received from her friend who was a F&ST volunteer, Mark decided that participating in the program would be something to pursue. As a result, the decision was made to attend F&ST. Mark recounted that *“it just sounded interesting – especially the activities that they were offering.”*

Because of Mark’s work schedule he was unable to attend F&ST meetings on a regular basis; however, when he did attend his first meeting he admitted, *“I was nervous about having to talk in front of people.”* In spite of that nervousness, Mark did grow to look forward to attending the meetings because F&ST had *“a certain zeal that made it appealing.”* The idea of being able to come together as a family was attractive to Mark. He recounted:

I was more involved with work than I was with the F&ST program a lot of times, but when I could attend I kinda grew to look forward to it after a couple of weeks. It was just doing something as a family together instead of everybody going their own way.

Like Melissa, Mark felt that having teachers at F&ST was beneficial because it helped introduce him to newer teachers and helped him get to know familiar teachers on a deeper level. One of F&ST’s goals is to help create a positive affiliation between parents and their child’s school by involving teaching staff as F&ST volunteers (F&ST Canada, 2006). Generally speaking, the more actively involved and interested a father is in his children’s care and education, the more intellectually developed his children are. One reason for this is that when fathers are involved, they tend to provide better economic support for their children. That additional support provides access to more

educational resources and better opportunities to learn (Kaplan, Lancaster & Anderson, 1998; Radin, 1991).

Mark not only felt that getting to know the teaching staff at F&ST was helpful to him as a parent, but also saw the benefits for his children. Mark recalled one incident where his two older boys wanted to go and talk with their former teacher, whom they had gotten to know through F&ST, about some troubles they were experiencing while attending the local junior high school. According to Mark and his wife, if that comfort level between the teacher and his older boys had not been established through F&ST, they may not have sought that teacher's help.

F&ST also promotes connection between families and community organizations in order to help encourage families to access community resources when needed (FAST, 2006). Mark was already involved as a community volunteer at his children's schools and at Air Cadets. In Mark's opinion, however, participation in the F&ST program did strengthen his community connection through meeting new families and helped him develop a stronger and more extensive informal support network.

Mark's time with his family was limited due to his obligations at work. There were times he would return home from work and his children were already asleep in bed, or he worked the late shift and needed to sleep in during the day – the time when his children were most active and wanting to spend time with their father or the time when his wife could use his help around the house. Mark recalled that it was often a struggle to balance his work and family life. Managing numerous and complex work and family roles was a source of stress for Mark. This stress can come from role strain, which occurs when the responsibilities of one role interfere with performing other roles, or from

spillover, which occurs when the conditions in one area of a person's life affects that person in another area. For example, inflexible work hours, an overbearing supervisor, or a less than positive work environment can have a negative impact on family life (Kiger & Riley, 2000).

F&ST recognizes that all families face stress in varying degrees. One of F&ST's goals is to promote cohesion and communication among family members to help buffer against stressors that can contribute to social isolation, family dysfunction and delinquency in children (FAST, 2006; F&ST Canada, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). According to Mark, F&ST provided opportunities to connect not only with other families, but also with his immediate family members. In his words, "*Instead of everybody going their own way, we kind of grouped.*"

In Mark's opinion, activities such as Feelings Charades, Scribbles and the Family Meal helped him become more sensitive to how he communicated with his family and helped him to be more cognizant of his family's needs. Mark recounted that the Family Meal reinforced the value and importance of Mark and his family working together in achieving a mutual goal – in this case preparing a meal for F&ST – while having fun at the same time. He found Feelings Charades beneficial in that it reawakened him to the importance of taking the time to listen to what his children and wife had been going through that week and what feelings they were experiencing at that particular time.

Family therapists suggest that one component that contributes to family dysfunction is when parents are not in charge of the family (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett & Phillips, 1976; Sayger, 1992). A disengaged, conflicted and disorganized family is considered to be a causal factor to violence, delinquency and school failure (Alexander,

1973). Mark reflected that taking part in activities such as the Family Meal, Charades and Scribbles reminded him of the importance of his role as a father. He felt that spending time with his family during program activities helped him gain not only a better understanding of his family, but also of his role within it.

Mark stated that he does volunteer at his children's schools at times and has taken on a leadership role with Air Cadets. Being involved with Air Cadets has provided Mark with the opportunity to connect with his older two sons; however, because Chad, his youngest son, chooses not to be involved in community activities, most of Mark's free time is spent with the older two boys. As a result, Chad misses out on regular one-on-one time with his father.

The positive, empathetic bond between a parent and child has been found to correlate with many positive outcomes and builds protective factors that buffer against violence and aggression (Kogan, 1978). Mark reflected that Special Play time was an important time for Mark and his youngest son, Chad. To Mark, this activity provided him and his son with scheduled time that was just for them – the kind of time that would be uninterrupted by other demands or obligations. Chad was able to have his dad all to himself. Mark recounted that as a result of this planned time he was able to develop more patience and a deeper, better relationship with Chad. Therefore he *“found the quiet time with Chad very rewarding.”* He recalled, *“I learned what Chad liked to do, not what I wanted him to do. I kinda learned to do what Chad likes once in a while.”*

Balancing a demanding work schedule while staying abreast of what is happening in his children's lives is a challenge for a busy Father. Being on the outside looking in at times makes it difficult to stay up-to-date with discipline issues his wife

may occasionally face in the raising of their children and in finding time to connect as a couple to discuss approaches that may be more effective in redirecting their kids.

Some research has shown that regular support from other parents is a protective factor that keeps a stressed or depressed parent from abusing the parent's child (McDonald & Frey, 1999). Even though Mark did not attend parent time on a regular basis, when he was able to attend he recounted that it provided him with ideas to "*learn to get along with each other and get better ideas from other parents on how to deal with certain issues.*" In Mark's opinion the parent one-on-one time provided him with some practical tools that he could use as a parent to help him interact more positively with his children.

Since graduating from F&ST, Mark and his family have become involved with F&STWORKS – a two-year follow-up support program to F&ST. Mark reflects that he enjoys F&STWORKS because, like F&ST, it provides a connecting point for him and his family.

We usually go for the hotdog lunches or whatever they are called; a few times there was sledding. We generally get together as a family and meet a few new faces.

Today, Mark also recommends F&ST without reservation and describes it by saying:

It [F&ST] is so family oriented and helpful. If I could do it again, I would prefer to be there all the time – I enjoyed it that much. I found it very adequate the way it is. I found it well structured and they kinda gave you a timetable that you followed. It is family oriented and I found it very helpful. It's a very unique program.

In conclusion, Mark recognized that he did struggle with balancing work and family responsibilities. It was through F&ST that Mark was reminded of the important priority family needs to be and how that may demand change in his time spent at work. He realized that he was missing-out on special time with his children and needed to reorganize his time in order to take a more active role in raising his family. Mark reflected that F&ST was attractive to him because it brought him together with his family and through that, he was reminded of the important influence and role he plays as a father. Mark also discovered that he and his wife Melissa could go to other parents for support in raising their three children. Mark's participation in F&ST proved to be the turning point for him to begin making personal changes in order to buffer his family against dysfunctional patterns.

One Family's Story

Between school, sports and other activities for children and the demands of work on parents, it can be a challenge for today's families to spend much real time together (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2008). According to Statistics Canada (2007), between 1986 and 2005 there has been an increasing trend toward more time spent at work and less time with family. It has been found that on average, workers spend 45 minutes less with their family during workdays than they did two decades ago. Based on a 260-day work year, that amounts to 195 hours less, or the equivalent of about five 40-hour work weeks. Add to that trend the high rates of divorce and separation and parents who may be under severe economic distress, it is no wonder many of today's families feel beleaguered (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2008).

Life can be stressful for a family lacking a supportive social network. The father needs to work long hours to help meet financial obligations and there is little time left for his wife and children. The mother often feels alone in maintaining a home and raising three adolescent boys. The children often feel disconnected from their parents and one another. Included in this family is one boy who struggles with school and has little interest in being involved in his community. The two older twin brothers have interests not shared by most of their peers and at times inadvertently exclude their younger brother. Life is indeed stressful and can place this family at risk for dysfunction and negative outcomes. Mark, Melissa and their three boys are one such family.

Thomason and Thames (2008) state that strong families recognize that there are benefits to be gained from time and activities together. By spending time together,

families build a reserve of good feelings, are able to cope with personal and family crises more effectively, and are more apt to promote the happiness and welfare of one another. This family time is prime time and is time that is planned. The family doesn't just take advantage of spare time to devote to the family; they actually plan for uninterrupted time (Thomason & Thames, 2008). Both Melissa and Mark and their three children (Chad, Armand, and Jason) recognized that not having significant time to spend with each other was an issue for them as a family. In their view, their family was "*always on the run, going here and there and finding it hard to actually connect and spend time together.*" Melissa reflected that as parents "*we get spread too thin and forget to take time with family.*"

Studies have shown that interventions exclusively involving youth are not so effective as those that incorporate youth and their family (Farrington & Welsh, 1999; Reese, Vera, Thompson, & Reyes, 2001; Tolan & Guerra, 1994). Consequently, the F&ST program is designed as an intervention that views and includes the family as an important component in bringing positive change in the life of a youth. When the opportunity to attend F&ST was presented to Chad and his family, there eventually was general consensus among them that participating in F&ST as a family would be beneficial; however, not everyone's initial response was the same. Chad, Armand, Melissa, and Mark recalled that they were excited about trying this new program because it sounded interesting and it promoted time together. Jason's initial response was different. He recalled that he "*thought it would be real stupid and that I wouldn't have fun.*" After giving the idea of attending more thought about how it might benefit him and

his family, Jason: *“I was looking forward to F&ST helping me develop a better relationship with my family.”*

One quality that constantly appears in strong families is a feeling that each family member can depend on each other and have the sense that the family is there for them, especially when placed in situations that take family members out of a comfort zone. They draw strength and confidence from each other to face new challenges (Thomason & Thames, 2008). When the time came for Melissa and her family to attend the initial F&ST meeting each of her family members, including Melissa, expressed some nervousness about participating. Melissa and Mark recounted that they were both nervous about the possibility of having to speak in front of the other participating family members. Chad and Jason reflected that they both felt nervous and shy because they weren't sure if they would know any of the other participants. Armand, however, recounted that he *“wasn't really nervous.”* Even though there was a general feeling of nervousness, with the exception of Armand, about attending the first F&ST meeting, each family member expressed that by knowing their family was attending together, they drew strength and confidence from the fact that they would be there for one another to support one another in looking past their nervousness.

One of the main draws to the F&ST program for Melissa and her family was the opportunity to connect as a family – something that they found very difficult to do given their busy household. One of the goals of F&ST is to build family unity, strengthen family relationships and empower parents in their role as parents (F&ST Canada, 2006). There was consensus among Melissa and her family that activities such as Scribbles, Feelings Charades and the Family Meal played a critical role in helping them develop

positive communication patterns and draw close together by learning to open up to one another and become more understanding and sensitive to one another's needs. Armand reflected that these activities helped with communication because the activities "*got my parents to talk to us more and we could talk back to them. We would take turns and not yell at each other.*" For Melissa, these activities taught her to listen more intently to what her children say or want to do. She reflected that as parents "*we sometimes forget that.*"

Scribbles, Feelings Charades and the Family Meal are designed to not only promote healthy interaction patterns and unity between family members, but also to empower parents in their role as parents within their immediate family (McDonald & Frey, 1999). By empowering parents, a healthy hierarchy is promoted in the family system. Studies show that without structure or hierarchy, the family is at risk for dysfunction that can lead to negative outcomes for children (Turnbull & Turnbull III, 1990; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2007). Through program activities such as Scribbles, Feelings Charades and the Family Meal, family hierarchy is promoted by providing parents opportunities to guide their children without coercion. Children's respect for their parents is promoted by having them serve their parents (FAST, 2006). Jason recounted the Family Meal as one of the F&ST highlights.

I think it [the Family Meal] was fun cause we actually had to go along with what each other was saying and how to do it [prepare the meal] properly. Everybody was working at the same time and I learned the ability to work as a group.

Mark admitted that he wasn't able to attend all of the F&ST meetings due to his demanding work schedule, but when he was able to attend he and Chad particularly looked forward to the Special Play Time activity. Special Play Time is designed to

promote the parent-child bond. Studies show that this uninterrupted play time not only improves the connection between the parent and child, but has been shown to reduce problem behaviors (Kogan, 1978). Because Mark was so busy and had little time to spend with Chad at home, Special Play Time provided Mark and Chad the opportunity to develop a bond and connect relationally. Mark reflected that this special time with his young son helped him to be more aware of Chad's interests and helped Mark realize that he needed to make a concerted effort to plan more uninterrupted time with his family at home. Chad recounted that he looked forward to Special Play Time "*because I got to spend time with my dad.*" As an observer, Armand recalled that one highlight for him was seeing Chad and his dad have the opportunity to spend time together. He recounted that "*it was the best activity for me because I got to see my little brother have fun with my dad.*"

Both Melissa and Mark recalled that the Parent One-on-One time was valuable in providing the tools to help parent their three boys more effectively. Though Mark was not able to attend these sessions regularly, Melissa was in regular attendance. Studies show that parents who feel socially isolated and lack a protective social network are at-risk for abusing or neglecting their children (McDonald & Frey, 1999). It has also been shown that parents are more likely to use newly learned parenting behaviors if they are socially supported (Wahler, 1983). Mark and Melissa recounted that Parent One-On-One Time enabled them to practice more patience with their children, spend more time doing homework with them and provided them with different approaches when dealing with discipline issues in the home. Melissa reflected that "*you get different ideas from different parents of how other parents deal with similar issues we deal with our kids. It*

helped us to have more patience and taught us to try new approaches with them.” The connections Melissa and Mark made through this Parent One-On-One Time have been carried through to their family’s involvement in F&STWORKS – a two year follow-up support program for F&ST program graduates.

F&ST promotes connection between families and their children’s school by involving teachers as leaders and hosting the program in the target child’s school (F&ST Canada, 2006). This connection has been shown to be a critical factor in buffering a young person against delinquency and academic failure (McDonald & Frey, 1999). Both Mark and Melissa were already involved with their children’s schools through volunteerism; however, having teachers involved in the F&ST program as leaders proved beneficial for Mark, Melissa and their three boys. For Mark and Melissa, they were able to establish a comfort level with school staff which made it easier for them to approach them about concerns related to their children, in particular their youngest son, Chad.

F&ST promoted a team approach in working with their children. Although Armand and Jason were attending a different school, getting to know the teachers at F&ST helped them in relating in a more positive manner to the teachers at their school. Jason and Armand also reflected that by getting to know teachers at F&ST they *“feel that they could go and talk to those teachers [including those at their own school] if they have a problem.”* For Chad, having teachers at F&ST was fun because he was able to get to know his teacher’s first names and to feel more comfortable being around them.

Although Chad, Jason, and Armand still have some challenges with school work, their attitude toward school has changed. Jason recounted that initially he felt school was

boring and a waste of time. He had no interest in doing homework and would rather do something else. After attending eight weeks of F&ST, Jason reflected,

It [F&ST] got me doing my homework more and helped me have a better attitude toward school. I began to realize that school isn't a waste of time. What helped change my attitude was having teachers at F&ST and having the chance to interact with them.

F&ST promotes connection between families and their community. This is accomplished by involving community members as F&ST volunteers and promoting informal connections between families and individuals (F&ST Canada, 2006). Studies show that in addition to the family, organizations and support networks outside of the home provide protective factors in buffering children and adults against negative outcomes (Brofenbrenner and Morris, 1998, FAST, 2006). Mark and Melissa reflected that being involved in F&ST did not necessarily help them to develop new connections with formal organizations in their community, but stated that it did strengthen connections they already had with their children's schools and introduced them to families they did not previously know. These families were ones that faced some of the same challenges in raising children that Mark and Melissa faced and were available for Mark and Melissa to turn to for support if needed.

For Armand, Jason and Chad, participating in F&ST enabled them to meet new friends and helped them realize that even though they may not fit into the in-crowd they had friends that they could turn to for support. Armand recounted that meeting older children at F&ST will make it easier for him to transition into high school because those

children will already be there. By meeting these older children, Armand explained that he will have some familiar faces to connect with when he starts high school in the fall.

Today, Melissa, Mark and their three children are involved in F&STWORKS – a two year follow-up support program for F&ST graduates. After completing an eight week program session of F&ST, Mark, Melissa and their family have learned the importance of slowing down and taking time for each other, respecting one another and communicating in a way that invites one another to be honest and open. These are the lessons that they are actively applying to their home life since graduating from F&ST. As a family they have no hesitation in recommending F&ST to other families and describe it by saying:

It's [F&ST] a positive place to be. You meet new friends, it helps you get along with other people, it helps improve communication with your family members, it helps build respect for each other, and it helps families develop a better relationship with the school.

In conclusion, Mark and his family have illustrated positive change within themselves, in the way they relate to one another and in the way they view their schools and teachers. These changes include more positive communication patterns among themselves and between themselves and the school. They have also placed a higher priority on spending family time together and seeing the need for a support network of friends. Though these changes were common to all family members in this study, there were some unique changes specific to particular family members.

Mark was reminded of the important influence he has as a father and began to see the importance of prioritizing his time in order to bring a healthy balance between work

and home. Melissa realized it was time to slow down and begin making a conscious effort to protect family time. She also saw the need to actively connect with other parents in finding support in her role as a parent. Jason began to change his attitude toward his teachers and put more effort into his school work. Armand realized that his transition to high school would be less traumatic because he would know some of the children that were already there ahead of him. He knew them because he met them at F&ST. Chad realized how much he missed his time with his father and wanted to make sure that he and his dad set aside time for each other at home.

These changes have been promoted through Mark and his family's involvement in the F&ST program. F&ST's aim is to buffer children against making unhealthy choices by helping build and promote healthy relating within the home, between the school and home, and between the home and community (F&ST Canada, 2006). In Mark's and his family's case, these outcomes of F&ST have met with success, so much so that Mark and his family have voluntarily followed through on attending F&STWORKS.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Overview

F&ST is an outreach and multi-family group strategy for building protective factors around children that grow up in stressful and sometimes isolated environments. This intervention has a solid foundation in theory, values, and the application of 30 years of published mental health research (Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of one select family who participated in the F&ST intervention program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. The five participants (two parents and their three children) have all experienced or been exposed to aspects of this intervention program and have relived that experience through interviews with this writer. Each participant's narrative provided both common as well as unique aspects, and threads of experience. These will be examined, discussed, and related to the current literature on each topic. These elements emerged after a lengthy process of reading and rereading each transcript, followed by summarizing, and categorizing similar or unique aspects of each story.

Findings

Since its inception, F&ST has had an effective national evaluation program demonstrating F&ST's impact on participants' lives (F&ST Canada, 2006; Harvard Family Research Project, 2008). Outcome measures for 1996 to 2004 indicate significant improvement in child's behavior in the school and home, and in families' involvement in the school and community (F&ST Canada, 2006). For one family experiencing challenges in different areas of their family life and in their youngest son's school performance, the invitation to attend F&ST proved to be the initial stepping stone to

learning and reinforcing skills to build resiliency in the face of these challenges. Mark and his family are one such family.

The question of how participation in the F&ST program helped make a difference in the life of Mark and his family members can only be answered by the family themselves. They spoke about positive leadership, meaningful activities, and connection with their children's schools and peers. These they claimed are the active ingredients that facilitated the development of positive personal relationships, personal awareness and skills, and healthy attitudes.

Program Leadership

Mark and his family spoke about the key role program leaders played in their F&ST experience. Program leaders were part of the reason Mark and his family first became involved in F&ST. It began with Chad's teacher taking the initiative to tell Chad about the program and then following that up by having a previous F&ST graduate contact Chad's family by phone and through a home visit.

Comments from Mark, Melissa, and their three boys showed that good leaders motivated them to participate, communicate openly and honestly, and provide support by making themselves available. These leaders acted as positive role models, and created an environment of trust and respect. It was these qualities that Mark and his family witnessed in F&ST leaders that helped make the decision to participate in F&ST an easy one to make and spurred them on to wanting to make positive changes in their home.

Program Activities

Mark and his family also reflected on the activities they experienced as part of the F&ST program and referred to them as meaningful in the way these activities helped

them improve family interaction, create connections with other program participants, identify formal and informal support networks, and build connections between themselves, the school and teachers. It also helped the family have a clearer understanding of the role each member had in the family unit. These activities also encouraged self-exploration, provided new experiences, provided recognition of achievement and growth, and provided opportunities for continued involvement such as in F&STWORKS (F&ST Canada, 2006; FAST, 2006; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006).

The narratives spoke to the value of activities that promoted family interaction. One such activity was the 15-minute one-on-one between a parent and child called Special Play. In another family interaction activity, participants designed flags to represent their family. Family interaction was also promoted through sharing a meal together. For many families, an evening meal can be a scheduling nightmare. With more parents working later and more children in after-school programs, finding the time to sit down together has become increasingly more difficult (ABC News, 2005). Studies have shown that children who have sit-down dinners with their family five or more times a week were 42 percent less likely to drink alcohol, 59 percent less likely to smoke cigarettes and 66 percent less likely to try marijuana (ABC News, 2005; Richards, 2007).

In the narratives, both parents reflected on activities like the Family Meal, Scribbles and Feelings Charades that taught them important communication skills and reminded them of the important authority role they have in raising their children. Family systems theory and Lewis et al. (1976) state that when families are strong and cohesive, trust one another, share emotions together, communicate openly, resolve conflicts easily,

and are organized according to hierarchy, many hardships can be survived. Hierarchy describes how families organize themselves into various smaller units or subsystems that together comprise the larger family system (Gladding, 2004; Turnbull & Turnbull III, 1990). In comparison, a disengaged, conflicted, disorganized family is considered to be a causal factor to violence and delinquency, substance abuse and school failure (Gladding, 2004).

The Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (2006) states that the mistake of many social interventions is the over reliance on formal networks such as professionals and institutions, and the lack of respect for informal networks such as peers. Research has shown that informal support networks are more reliable and constant over time and people feel more comfortable using them (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

F&ST meetings had time set aside in each session for parents to voice concerns, feelings, and ideas. Discussions with other parents who had similar experiences was also helpful. In the narratives, the parents recounted that these discussions allowed them to learn more about one another, to be exposed to new parenting techniques, and establish connection with a network of parents to turn to for support.

Other activities that promoted relationships between the father, his family and other participants were games and crafts for children, and the Kids' Play Time in the gym. These activities promoted the development of an informal support network for Mark, Melissa, and their three boys. F&ST is a multi-family intervention program that promotes a social connection between different families and strives to build and enhance long-term relationships to provide youth and parents a social safety net of protective factors for getting through difficult times (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Community Representation

The purpose behind having community representatives (e.g. RCMP, addictions counselors etc.) involved as volunteers at F&ST is to develop non-threatening connections between families and formal support systems with the goal of reducing participant hesitancy in accessing those supports when needed (McDonald & Frey, 1999; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 2006). Because Mark and his family did become more familiar and comfortable with people connected to formal supports in the community, they felt that they did not have need to approach these support systems at this time, but did feel more comfortable in doing so if the need arose.

Parental Involvement with the School

According to Stevenson and Baker (1987), parent involvement in the school system is integral to the academic achievement and psychosocial functioning of the child; in addition, Resnick et al. (1997) stated that two crucial factors significantly associated with youth staying out of trouble were: connections between parents and youth, and positive associations with the school. It was revealed in the narratives that the family did feel that their involvement in F&ST helped contribute to them having a more positive connection with their school. This connection with the school also contributed to their children developing a better attitude toward their teachers and school work, and their children felt more comfortable in approaching their teachers when they were faced with challenges either related to school or outside of school. Not only did both parents feel that their connection to the school was beneficial for them, but also for new families to the school community.

Recognition

Both parents recounted that it was important to them that the work and effort they put into F&ST was recognized. They recalled how the closing ceremonies after each meeting and the graduation program at the completion of the F&ST program both helped make them feel they were part of a bigger family. It gave them a sense of belonging, a sense of acceptance. When F&ST ended, members of the family expressed sadness, but were happy for the opportunity to continue on in F&STWORKS – a two year support follow-up program for F&ST graduates. Through this program, the family would be given the opportunity to continue with relationships and informal support networks established through their involvement in the F&ST program. Research has shown that the absence of regular support through informal support systems such as other parents and families correlates with parents or families neglecting and not using relational skills taught through F&ST (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

These findings are a testimony to the potential positive impact a family based intervention can have on one family facing family stressors in providing them with protective factors when facing challenges.

Community

Findings from this study have certain implications for the community, the school and for families. With regard to community, the Kingston Community Health Centre (2008) states that healthy individuals and healthy families build healthy neighborhoods and communities. Community health is viewed as more than merely an absence of disease; a healthy community includes those elements that enable people to maintain a high quality of life and productivity. Those elements include such things as roads,

schools, playgrounds, and access to services to meet the needs of the people in that community.

The implication for community is that without healthy families, local communities will see more incidences of violence, drug abuse, vandalism and an increased drain on resources to provide rehabilitation. From a societal or community perspective, financial costs, loss of competent citizens, ineffective parents and a future cycle of more problems will deteriorate the quality of community (Dulmus & Rapp-Paglicci, 2000; Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). Consequently it has been argued that a preventive approach to the consequences of unhealthy families is more cost effective than treating problems once they occur because prevention can help reduce the chances of developing or exacerbating a problem (Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2004). The results from this study show that healthy families can be promoted through a preventive family intervention program such as F&ST. Because community only stands to benefit from the promotion of healthy families within its jurisdiction, it makes sense that local community organizations support such initiatives as F&ST through funding and or as volunteers.

Community organizations refers to groups of people in the geographical area of a school district who have an interest in the well-being of the young children and families that reside there (e.g. the RCMP, Addictions Services, Social Services) (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998). It is these organizations that can play a role in providing formal community supports to families in need. Generally, several separate and distinct departments and agencies deliver education, social, health, justice, and recreation services at the provincial, regional and local levels. Service providers such as teachers, social

workers, young offender's workers, or recreation coordinators work with children and families to address separate needs and often in isolation from one another. Needs are seen as separate and discrete and the agencies providing the services each contribute their own expertise and programs (Saskatchewan Education and Training, 1994).

Experience has shown that despite the very best intentions, problems have surfaced with this delivery method: for example, children and families have had to fit the available services rather than choose the services most appropriate to them. Sometimes, services have overlapped; other times the needs of some children and families have "fallen through the cracks" in the system. Occasionally, the different services provided to a single family have even been at odds. In addition, the complexity of the systems has made it difficult for children and their families to identify and to access the services they need. Findings from F&ST indicate that the implication for community organizations is the need to collaborate and coordinate community service providers to provide a comprehensive, holistic continuum of services in meeting the needs of children and families effectively (Saskatchewan Education And Training, 1994; Thompson, 1992).

Community organizations do play a significant, supportive role to families at-risk, but need to do so as a united front. This can be accomplished by using an interagency approach whereby community agencies come to the same table, at the same time, to discuss how they can complement each other's services in meeting the needs of families or children in need.

Schools

In addition to the need for community organizations to collaborate and complement each other's services, the findings from this study show an implication for

schools, namely that schools can play a pivotal role in making these services more accessible to families and children in need. Because children spend a good portion of their developing years in the school setting it makes sense to have the school act as a connecting point between formal support services and families that are in need. Findings indicate that F&ST promotes families coming together in one location where they can make informal connections with community agencies (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Thompson (1992) states that integrated *school-linked* services don't necessarily mean that services are school based or located in the school. While they may be located in a school, they may also be based in a community centre, a health facility, a day care centre or even within homes. Often, however, schools are an appropriate place for the delivery of integrated services.

The advantages of basing these services within a school include: students being able to access the services of other agencies easily and on an ongoing basis with less disruption to their classroom work. Further advantages are: a range of professionals can lend their assistance, ideas and support if an urgent situation arises; professionals can communicate with each other to ensure common information and understandings; parents can access service providers in one location; and programming can involve the parents in their child's education (Saskatchewan Education And Training, 1994).

Additional implications for the school as a result of findings from F&ST include: the importance of school staff's involvement as leaders in the program, using the school as a program delivery location and the involvement of previous F&ST graduates as program volunteers. The present study has shown that by involving teaching staff as leaders in the program, it promotes a positive connection between parents, children and

their teachers, and it also promotes a positive affiliation with their child's school. The end result of this has been that the select family feels more comfortable with approaching teachers to discuss issues surrounding their children and they feel that they are more invested in their child's school life. The family also feels that they have healthy communication between the school and home. They have seen improvement in their children's attitudes toward school and their children are less hesitant to approach their teachers with questions or concerns.

Because young people spend a good portion of their developing years in the school environment, it makes sense that the F&ST program be delivered in the school setting. The present study has shown that by delivering the program in the school of the at-risk child, it promotes a stronger affiliation between that at-risk child and their school. It also promotes a stronger affiliation between the at-risk child's parents and their child's school. Studies show that this positive affiliation between parents, their children and their school correlates with at-risk youth staying out of trouble (Hawkins, 1996). Delivery of the F&ST program within the school setting also promotes a connection between community agencies, local school teaching staff and local school families.

Results from the present study have found that the select family was nervous about attending their first F&ST session. This nervousness was primarily centered on not knowing what would be expected of them. The purpose behind having previous F&ST graduates involved as volunteers, and in some cases as leaders, is to help minimize hesitancy family members may experience when invited to be part of the program. The present study found that by promoting connection between previous graduates and potential participants, it helped encourage and motivate the select family to participate. It

was also beneficial to have potential participants connect with F&ST graduates they already knew as this gave the potential participant a familiar face to initially connect with during their first F&ST meeting.

Further implications for schools include the importance of considering environmental factors when assessing reasons for a student's misbehavior or poor academic performance. It also includes building-in activities during the regular school day that promotes a positive view of family as well as positive social skills and purposely planning for connecting with at-risk kids on a relational level. Findings from the present research show that poor family structure, negative experiences in settings such as the home and outside the home, day to day emotional and relational stresses and the lack of a significant person to turn to can have a negative impact on a child's performance at home and at school.

F&ST is built on the belief that parents love their children and want a better life for them. The program is designed to promote family members working together with community professionals (e.g. teachers, community agencies) to strengthen the family unit and develop a network of informal and formal social supports to help parents and their children (F&ST Canada, 2006).

Effective family intervention rarely occurs in isolation, but involves the investment of a variety of sources. F&ST promotes informal interaction between community agencies such as addictions counselors, family therapists and counselors of domestic violence. Over time, this results in an increase in the appropriate use of services by parents and their family (McDonald & Frey, 1999). In order for effective intervention to take place, however, families need to be open to help when needed and to

take the initiative to seek that help. By having community representatives involved as volunteers at F&ST, it helps bring agencies closer to families. McDonald et al. (1997) states that two to four years after graduating from F&ST, 26% of parents reported that they self-refer to family counseling. Findings from the present research indicate that the select family did become more familiar with community agencies, and because of that, would know how and who to contact if they were in need of formal support in the future.

Family

Some research has shown that interpersonal bonds inhibit aggression and violence in youth and that regular support from adult peers is a protective factor against parents neglecting and abusing their children (Hawkins, 1996; McDonald & Frey, 1999). F&ST promotes parent to parent bond and parent/child, child/child bonds and helps maintain those connections through F&STWORKS. The implication for families is that these social/relational networks are important for families to build resilience in times of adversity; consequently, families need to actively establish these social/relational connections. Research also shows that if these connections are not maintained, the protective factor of peer and family support can be lost and dysfunction can result (Wahler, 1983). The onus on families is that they need to place a priority on maintaining these social/relational connections so as not to eliminate the protective factors that come with them.

Findings from the present research also indicate that the select family did establish social connections outside of the home through activities in the F&ST program, but also deepened their relationship with each other within the home. These connections have helped this family develop tolerance for each other, helped the parents learn new

ways of addressing discipline issues with their children, helped the parents and their three children make new friends to whom they can turn to in time of need and helped this family become familiar with new families who were part of the school community. This family has also chosen to continue on into F&STWORKS where these social / relational connections can be deepened and maintained.

Implications for Future Research

This study involved telling the story of one select family participating in the F&ST program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. In this respect, future research should: first, focus on the experiences of more than one family participating in the F&ST program at a select school and then compare their experiences to identify common and discrepant themes within that specific school setting. Second, focus on one family from each school offering this program in a single community and then compare their experiences across school settings. Third, focus on one family from each school offering this program from different locations in a school division and then compare their experiences across communities. Fourth, select a family with aboriginal descent, a single-parent family, a family with both boys and girls and compare their experiences to findings gleaned from the present study.

Information gathered from these comparative studies may provide insight into risk and resilience factors present in different families, different school settings and different communities. This knowledge may help in the development of program activities that are tailored to the unique needs of communities or schools within a specific school division. It may also assist program planners in deciding which community agencies parents would most benefit from and then approaching those community representatives to act as

volunteers at F&ST meetings. These comparative studies may also provide insight into how the developmental level of participants correlates with effectiveness of program impact; this insight may assist in the selection or modification of program content to meet the needs of participants. In addition, these comparative studies may also provide additional insight into how the hierarchical structure within different families, in different communities and schools, operates and how those structures add to or protect against stress on the family unit. Results from these studies may help in deciding on the amount of focus given on particular activities in the program (e.g. more focus could be given to activities that build healthy family hierarchy and build respect among family members).

Conclusion

Like any intervention or program, there is an inherent goal to be achieved - the F&ST program is no different. According to the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (2006), F&ST Canada (2006) and FAST (2006), the main goals of the program are: to improve family relationships and build stronger family bonds, promote children's success in school, in the home and in the community, prevent addictions by children, youth and their families, reduce stress that parents and children experience in daily life, lessen the social isolation often experienced by vulnerable children and their families and increase parent involvement in their children's school and in their community.

The family in this study faced the stressors of trying to stay relationally connected with one another, but finding it difficult because of daily demands. In addition to this, the adolescent growing pains of three young boys were observed - three boys searching to find their way, their identities both inside and outside the nuclear family.

Most importantly, this family has experienced growth in: family relationships, positive affiliations, students' self esteem and success by the development and incorporation of one program – F&ST. To say thank you for the ability to be present on this inside track somehow seems null and void.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have shown that F&ST is an effective, family-based intervention program. It may not solve all the issues that embed themselves so forcibly within the families that comprise our school systems, nor will it make every child revitalized to meet the challenges of adolescence and of school. What F&ST has accomplished, however, is that it has given Mark and his family a start - a new beginning that they may not have otherwise had.

Mark and his family have been given some of the tools to live a new life – hopefully, a better life. As educators, we have learned that children learn what they live. The learning for Mark and his family will hopefully be, as it is for all of us, life long.

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Appendix A

Guiding Questions

1. How did you come to know about the F&ST program at Jubilee School?
2. What was it about the program that interested you? What concerns or questions did you have about the program?
3. After hearing about the program, in what way did you feel that the program would be helpful to you and your family? In what way did you feel it might not be helpful?
4. How did the school go about contacting you to invite you to be a participant in the program? What were your feelings and thoughts about the way you were invited?
5. What feelings or thoughts did you have about being invited to be a participant in the program?
6. What were your reason(s) for deciding to agree to be a participant in F&ST?
7. What feelings or thoughts did you have while attending the first F&ST meeting? In what way did other participants and program leaders make you feel comfortable / uncomfortable?
8. In what ways has your participation in F&ST helped you in your role as a parent? Which F&ST activities helped you in this way?
9. In what ways has your participation in F&ST affected your relationship with your child? Your child's school? Other parents? Your community? Which F&ST activities have helped you in this way?
10. In what ways has your participation in F&ST helped your child's performance in school?
11. In what ways has your participation in F&ST helped relationships at home?
12. If you were asked to describe what F&ST is, how would you describe it?
13. What would you say meant the most to you and was the greatest benefit for you and your family, as a result of participating in F&ST?
14. What have you learned about yourself after being a participant in F&ST?

15. Did you attend all of the sessional F&ST meetings and are you are a graduate of the program?
16. What reasons would you give another family to encourage them to become participants in F&ST?
17. What suggestions would you make to help make F&ST more effective in meeting the needs of families?

Guiding Questions (Child)

1. How did you feel when you knew you were going to be a participant in the F&ST program at Jubilee School?
2. What is the F&ST program and what does it do?
3. What were you looking forward to about being a participant?
4. What was your most favorite activity at F&ST? Why was it your most favorite?
5. What activity did you not enjoy? What was it about the activity that you didn't enjoy?
6. What is it you like about having some of the teachers participating in F&ST? What is it you do not like about having some of the teachers participate?
7. In what way(s) have your feelings about school changed because of participating in F&ST?
8. In what way(s) has F&ST helped you get along better with your teachers at school? Your parents? Your brothers/sisters?
9. What would you say to one of your friends to get them to participate in F&ST?

Appendix B

Data/Transcript Authenticity

Title of Study: The F&ST Experience: a Narrative Study

This transcript form is to give acknowledgement that the interview data accurately reflects what was said in the interviews with John Carr (Researcher). This data may be included in the final written thesis of John Carr (Researcher).

I, _____, hereby give acknowledgement that the transcribed interview data accurately reflects what was said in my interview. I am comfortable with the efforts that have been taken to ensure that any identifying information of this material has been altered or eliminated. I have reviewed the transcripts of my interview and hereby acknowledge there in the information and consent form. **I have a copy of the Sign-off Permission Form for my own records.**

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Data/Transcript Authenticity (Child)

Title of Study: The F&ST Experience: a Narrative Study

This transcript form is to give acknowledgement that the interview data accurately reflects what was said in the interviews with John Carr (Researcher). This data may be included in the final written thesis of John Carr (Researcher).

I, _____, on behalf of my child, _____, hereby give acknowledgement that the transcribed interview data accurately reflects what was said in my child’s interview. I am comfortable with the efforts that have been taken to ensure that any identifying information of this material has been altered or eliminated. My child and I have reviewed the transcripts of my child’s interview and hereby acknowledge there in the information and consent form. **I have a copy of the Sign-off Permission Form for my own records.**

Signature of Participant (Child)

Date

Signature of Parent

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C

Sign-off Release Form

Title of Study: The F&ST Experience: a Narrative Study

I, _____, have reviewed the stories of my experiences written by John Carr, and I agree that they accurately reflect what I shared in the interviews. I hereby give my permission to include the above material for inclusion in John Carr’s (researcher) final written thesis. I am satisfied with the efforts that have been taken to ensure that any identifying information on this document has been altered or eliminated. **I have a copy of the Sign-off Permission Form for my own records.**

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Sign-off Release Form (Child)

Title of Study: The F&ST Experience: a Narrative Study

I, _____, have reviewed the stories of my child _____ experiences written by John Carr, and I agree that they accurately reflect what was shared in the interviews. I hereby give my permission to include the above material for inclusion in John Carr’s (researcher) final written thesis. I am satisfied with the efforts that have been taken to ensure that any identifying information on this document has been altered or eliminated. **I have a copy of the Sign-off Release Form for my own records.**

Signature of Participant (Child)

Date

Signature of Parent

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Consent Form

Title of Study:

The F&ST Experience: A Narrative Study

Researcher:

John Carr, Master of Education candidate in the College of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan

You are being asked to voluntarily take part in a research project entitled, *The F&ST Experience: a Narrative Study*. The goal of this study is to understand your experiences, thoughts and feelings about being a participant in the F&ST program at Jubilee Elementary School. The purpose is to give you the opportunity to share the story of your F&ST experience and how your involvement in the program has affected you personally, as well as those around you. The benefit to you as the participant is an awareness of the personal impact of F&ST and an affirmation of your personal experiences. The story of your experiences can also be helpful in guiding others to decide whether or not their involvement in F&ST would be beneficial for them.

Due to the fact that John Carr (researcher) is a member and former teacher within the community, there is the possibility of prior relationship between the researcher and yourself; consequently, you should not feel any pressure to participate in the study. Participation however, will involve answering guided questions about your experiences and will take place in two interviews consisting of approximately 60-90 minutes each. Interviews will be audio taped and transcribed and will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in my supervisor's office for a minimum of 5 years. Confidentiality regarding the information that you provide will be assured by the researcher and my supervisor and your individual answers will not be shared or presented in any way that would identify you as the source.

Upon beginning the study, you will be given a brief explanation of the study and an opportunity to ask questions. You may refuse to answer any interview questions and are free to withdraw from participation in thesis study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from this study, all information you provided will be destroyed.

You will have the opportunity to review and revise all transcribed interview data and your recreated story and remove or change any of the information at any time. A list of guiding questions will be offered to you as an opportunity to prepare for the interview and also to ask the researcher any questions. You will be asked to sign a transcript release form, acknowledging that the transcript and recreated story accurately reflects what was said in your personal interview and also giving permission to include excerpts from the transcripts to be used in the thesis. Further contact by the researcher after the interviews will be to accommodate questions or clarification.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project itself or the methods used, you should contact John Carr (researcher) at 236-2647 or David Mykota (project supervisor) at 966-5258 / david.mykota@usask.ca

The proposed research project was reviewed and approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board on _____, 2007. Please feel free to contact the Ethics Office at 966-2084 if you have any questions about this study or the rights of a participant in any study.

I have read and understand the description provided above; I have been provided an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I agree to participate in the study described above, with the understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. **A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.**

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Parental Consent (For child under 18 years of age)

Title of Study:

The F&ST Experience: A Narrative Study

Researcher:

John Carr, Master of Education candidate in the College of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan

Your child is being asked to voluntarily take part in a research project entitled, *The F&ST Experience: a Narrative Study*. The goal of this study is to understand your child's experiences, thoughts and feelings about being a participant in the F&ST program at Jubilee Elementary School. The purpose is to provide them the opportunity to share the story of their F&ST experience and how involvement in the program has affected them personally, as well as those around them. F&ST is designed as a family-oriented program that encourages participation from all family members; consequently, your child's participation in this study is crucial in creating a more rounded and complete picture of your family's experience as participants in the program. The benefit to your child as a participant is an awareness of the personal impact of F&ST and an affirmation of their personal experiences. The story of their experience can also be helpful in guiding others to decide whether or not their involvement in F&ST would be beneficial for them.

Due to the fact that John Carr (researcher) is a member and former teacher within the community, there is the possibility of prior relationship between the researcher and your child; consequently, your child should not feel any pressure to participate in the study. Participation however, will involve answering guided questions about their experiences and will take place in two interviews consisting of approximately 30-60 minutes each. A list of guiding questions will be offered to you, to review with your child, as an opportunity for them to prepare for the interview and also to ask the researcher any questions. Interviews will be audio taped and transcribed and will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in my supervisor's office for a minimum of 5 years. Confidentiality regarding the information that they provide will be assured by the researcher and my supervisor and their individual answers will not be shared or presented in any way that would identify them as the source. Though the ideal interview process

involves one on one interaction, some children may be shy in being interviewed by someone they do not know. For that reason, your child will have the option of having their parent(s) present while they are being interviewed. Your child may refuse to answer any interview questions and are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. If they choose to withdraw from this study, all information they have provided will be destroyed.

Your child will have the opportunity to review and revise all transcribed interview data and their recreated story and remove or change any of the information at any time. They will have the option of doing this in the presence of their parent(s) if they request Interview transcript data will be open to both the parent(s) and child. You will be asked to sign a transcript release form, on behalf of your child, acknowledging that the transcript and recreated story accurately reflects what was said in their personal interview and also giving permission to include excerpts from the transcripts to be used in the thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project itself or the methods used, you should contact John Carr (researcher) at 236-2647 or David Mykota (project supervisor) at 966-5258 / david.mykota@usask.ca

The proposed research project was reviewed and approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board on _____, 2007. Please feel free to contact the Ethics Office at 966-2084 if you have any questions about this study or the rights of a participant in any study.

I have read and understand the description provided above; I have been provided an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I agree to have my child participate in the study described above, with the understanding that they may withdraw this consent at any time. **A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.**

Name of Participant (child): _____

Signature of Participant (child): _____ Date: _____

Signature of Parent(s) _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Oral Consent (child under 18 years of age)

Oral Script

Title of Study: The F&ST Experience: A Narrative Study

My name is John Carr and I am a student at the University of Saskatchewan. I am interested in finding out what it was like for you to participate in the F&ST program at Jubilee Elementary School (e.g. what you enjoyed, your favorite activities).

I would like to ask your permission to tape record and interview you about your experiences and then use your answers in my research project (thesis) for school. Your participation involves two interviews, about one hour in length. You don't have to feel pressured to participate or to answer all of the questions you are asked. You can even have you parent(s) present with you during both interviews. The idea is to give you an opportunity to tell others about what it was like for you to be involved in the F&ST program. You will also have the chance to check to make sure that I have recorded your answers correctly.

No one other than myself or your parents will know that the answers you give were answered by you.

I _____ give John Carr (researcher) to interview me about my participation in the F&ST program at Jubilee Elementary School and use my answers in his research project (thesis).

Signature of Participant (child): _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E

Ethics Proposal

1. Name of Researcher: John Carr

Supervisor: David Mykota

Department: College of Education, Educational Psychology & Special Education

1a. Name of student: John Carr

1b. Anticipated start date of research study: September, 2007

Expected completion date of research study: February, 2008

2. Title of Study: The F&ST Experience: a Narrative Study

3. Abstract:

F&ST (Family and Schools Together) is an intervention program that has grown out of the realization that through the development of protective factors, such as meaningful relationships between people, incidences of school failure and delinquency will be reduced. F&ST Canada (2006), Pridmore (2002) and the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (2006) state that outcome studies show involvement in F&ST has been shown to reduce family conflict, decrease parent isolation, increase parent involvement in the school, increase friendship networks of parents and their children, increase academic performance and decrease incidences of negative child conduct.

For this study, a qualitative research inquiry, informed by narrative, is proposed to answer the question, What are the experiences of one select family participating in the F&ST (Family and Schools Together) intervention program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan? One select family will be chosen, through purposeful sampling, with the assistance of F&ST leadership and school administration. Interviews will be conducted, using guiding questions, to encourage family members to tell their stories and share their feelings, thoughts and perspectives in relation to their experience as a participant in the F&ST program.

4. Funding: There are no sources of funding supporting this research

5. Expertise:

None of these criteria apply, since there are no vulnerable populations, distinct cultural groups, or in cases where the research is above minimal risk, so this section may be omitted.

6. Conflict of Interest:

There are two potential areas of conflict. The first is that the selection of the participating family will be conducted in partnership with F&ST leadership and the school administrator in whose school the program is being conducted. The second is that I am a member and former teacher in the community. In light of this, effort will be to maintain objectivity and effort will be made to select a family that I have had no

professional contact with although the individuals in the family may have knowledge of who I am as a member of the community.

7. Participants:

Because school administration and F&ST team leadership will already have some familiarity with families in attendance at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan, communication will be established with the selected family by telephone – initially by the principal or a F&ST team leader and then followed-up by myself, or by a home visit in the presence of a F&ST team leader (whom the family will already know) – in order to minimize any anxiety on the part of the potential candidate. The criteria that will be used for selecting the family for this study are as follows:

1. Parent(s) and children (the family unit) must all be, or have been, a participant in the F&ST program at this particular community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan .
2. Participants must be willing and be comfortable with the process of telling their experiences in the interview setting.
3. Participants must have been a participant in the F&ST program at this particular community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan within the last two years.

8. Consent:

Consent forms are located in Appendix B and clearly outline the details of the study and the rights and obligations of the participant. Their signature on the form will signify the participant's understanding of their consent, obligations and rights. In all cases of children under the age of 18, signed consent of the parent(s), guardian(s) or caregiver(s) will be obtained prior to their participation. The child's permission will also be obtained.

9. Methods and Procedures:

Two Interviews of approximately 30-90 minutes in length will be the mode of data collection in this study. A list of guiding questions (found in Appendix C) will be furnished to the participant before the first interview in order to give them an idea of the type of questions that will be asked, and also to help them reflect on their experience prior to the interview. The participant may refuse to answer any question and will be allowed to withdraw at any time without penalty. Interviewing methods will be used along with guiding questions to obtain information about experiences as a participant in the F&ST program at a community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. The initial meeting will be made to begin building rapport and explain the purpose for the study. The participants will be informed of their rights, consent, and obligations along with an explanation of the consent form. Children will have the option of having their parents present during the interview and debriefing process.

After each subsequent interview, transcripts will be created and participants will be asked to review them for content and for confidentiality, being able to change, or remove any kind of information they see as necessary. These revisions will be

discussed with the researcher by phone or in person. Following completion of the two interviews and two revisions of content, I will initiate the recreation of each participant's story. After each story is written, the participant will once again be asked to review the story for accuracy and confidentiality. It may be necessary for the researcher to contact the participants for clarification, or for more information until no more revisions of the stories are required.

10. Storage of Data:

At the conclusion of this study, the information that has been collected will be stored in a locked, secure file cabinet in my supervisor's, David Mykota's, office. This data will be saved for a minimum of 5 years after the completion of this study.

11. Dissemination of Results:

Data collected will be used to provide written material for the thesis. The thesis will be submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan.

12. Risks, Benefits, and Deception:

Participants will be debriefed in the initial meeting about the nature of the study and given a copy of the guiding questions (Appendix C), which will be used in the interview process. Participants may refuse to answer any questions and are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Should the participant withdraw, all data will be promptly destroyed. Written consent will be obtained from each participant. Audiotapes will be used with the written consent of the participants. Information will be kept confidential and be coded with no identifying information. Pseudonyms will be used in the final written thesis to insure absolute anonymity. The participants will not receive compensation, but have the opportunity to share their story and gain a sense of contribution to what it means to be a participant in the F&ST program at this particular community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan. The costs/inconveniences/risks of this study include:

1. The understanding that participating requires approximately 30-90 minutes of your time (for each of the two interviews).
2. The understanding that the interview will require you to review the interview questions prior to the actual interview.
3. The understanding that the participant will be required to approve the accuracy of their interview transcript.
4. The understanding that the participant's permission must be given to use their transcript in the final written thesis of John Carr (Researcher).

The Benefits of the study include:

1. Personal understanding of the impact of being a participant in the F&ST program at this particular community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan.
2. The opportunity to share your story of participation in the F&ST program at this particular community school in Northwestern Saskatchewan.

3. The opportunity to assist others in coming to a decision about participating in F&ST through the telling of your story.
4. The opportunity to contribute to a greater understanding of how F&ST can impact families.
5. Affirmation of your experience.

13. Confidentiality:

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the school and community will be insured. The participants will be informed verbally and in writing of their rights of confidentiality. They will also be given a consent form (Appendix B) to sign which details the exact nature of the study, the right to refusal about answering any questions, and the right to with-draw from the study at any time without penalty. Signature of the form will signify their understanding of their rights and will be taken as consent of the participant. All data will be coded and the participants will be given pseudonyms to protect the identities of each individual. All participants will have the opportunity to review and revise all transcribed interview data and also remove any of their responses. Interview transcripts will be open to both the parent(s) and children of the participating family. Participants will be requested to sign a transcript release form (Appendix D) wherein they will acknowledge by their signature that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to say. Signing of a sign-off release form (Appendix E) will indicate the participant's consent to what it included in the final thesis document.

14. Data/Transcript Release:

The parent, and parent and child, will review the final interview transcript and sign the transcript release form found in Appendix D thereby acknowledging that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to say.

15. Debriefing and Feedback:

Opportunity for debriefing and feedback will take place when the data/transcript release and sign-off forms are signed by the participants. Parents will be debriefed one-on-one whereas their child may be debriefed one-on-one, or with the parent(s) present, depending on the comfort level of the child and/or parent(s).

The participating family, and Jubilee Elementary School, will have the opportunity to receive a copy of the final completed thesis.

16. Required Signatures:

Researcher Name: _____ Signature: _____

Supervisor Name: _____ Signature: _____

Department Head: _____ Signature: _____

Dean (College of Education, Educational Psychology & Special Education)

Signature: _____

Contact Name:

John Carr Phone: 236-2647 Email: jwc419@usask.ca

