

Stories and Statistics

NORA SPINKS

The Vanier Institute is an evidence-based teaching and learning organization. We are a national resource for anyone interested in or involved with families in Canada. Through our publications, presentations and Web resources, we provide a wealth of information about families and family life, family experiences, expectations and aspirations. But in order to do so effectively, we need to *understand* families in all their diversity.

By analyzing data, synthesizing information, organizing resources and mobilizing knowledge, we continually increase our understanding of families in Canada. We facilitate and engage in conversations, we collect stories from families and people who work with families or study family life, and we identify leading and promising practices in communities, organizations and workplaces.

Using the family lens, we analyze data from our surveys and projects and from other sources, including

Statistics Canada and our research and community partners. We synthesize this information and publish reports, fact sheets and magazines. We organize resources and mobilize knowledge at events, online and in the media.

We facilitate conversations at “listening/learning events” and “speaking/teaching events,” such as kitchen table dialogues, round tables, community engagement events, conferences and webinars.

Effective practices and programs designed to support families are built on knowledge, and knowledge takes many forms. Leading, or *evidence-based*, practices are typically rooted in *quantitative data* and have been subject to peer-reviewed assessment or formal program evaluation. On the other hand, promising practices, or *practice-based evidence*, are based on *individual stories* or *organizational experiences*. Each approach has its respective strengths.

Stories in the absence of data may be perceived as opinions or myths. Data in the absence of stories and context can be misleading or risk misinterpretation. But we overlook neither, as they both contribute to different aspects of our understanding. By documenting stories and synthesizing data, we capture the richness of the diversity and the complexity of family experiences.

Stories and practice-based evidence validate data. Data and evidence-based practice validate the stories. Together, they provide a rich understanding of how families interact with, have an impact on and are affected by social, economic, environmental and cultural forces.

Research that is rooted in a variety of sources and approaches helps us to honour and respect the past, understand and appreciate the present, and plan and prepare for the future. The Institute acts as a facilitator of learning, interpreting information and transferring knowledge from one environment to another – from experience to evidence and evidence to experience, from research to conversations and conversations to research, from academia to community and from community to academia.

Together, these activities inform policy discussions, stimulate further conversations and guide future research, contributing to our collective understanding of the complexity and dynamism of families in Canada. ◀



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