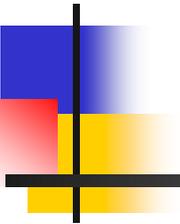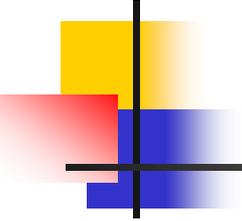# Interventions for At-Risk Youth in High Poverty Neighbourhoods
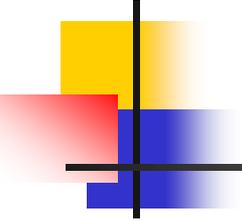
May, 2011

McMaster-Community Poverty Initiative
McMaster University

Background

- The McMaster Community Poverty Initiative is a group of faculty, staff, and students that are working on ways to reduce poverty in Hamilton.

- By building bridges between our research ability and the community.

Research Questions

1. How does evidence-based research define risks for children and youth?

2. How does the academic literature define risks for children and youth living in high poverty neighbourhoods?

3. What does the academic literature tell us about interventions that are effective in helping at-risk youth living in poverty succeed academically?

4. What does evidence-based research tell us about interventions that are effective in helping at-risk youth living in poverty succeed academically?
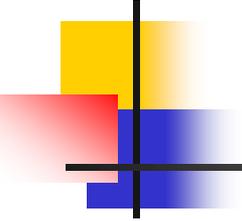
Context: Population

- Children in early childhood
- Youth in their teen years
- Elementary and high school students with low levels of academic achievement and school outcomes.
- High school students at-risk of dropping out
- Street involved youth
- Mainstream youth
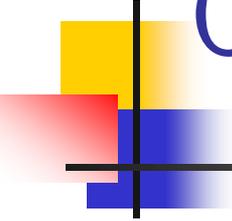
Context: Socioeconomic Status

- Family income, poverty level, parental education, parental employment status, and occupational prestige.

- Related to social-emotional and cognitive/educational outcomes
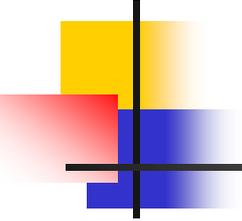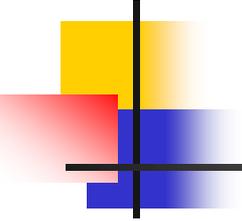
Hamilton Context: Socioeconomic Status

- Code Red
- Vital Signs

- Large disparities between neighbourhoods
- Poverty is far reaching
- Impacts health, employability, access to housing, parenting quality, and educational trajectories.
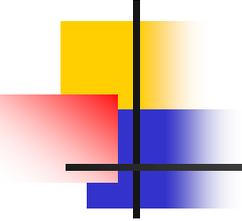
Methods

- The Sandbox Project Conference

- Academic literature searches

- Community feedback (Brown Bag Lunch)

Findings: RISKS

## Relationships:

- **Parenting**

  Main message: Accounting for family processes, specifically the parent-adolescent relationship is imperative for analyses of poverty, trajectories of socioeconomic status, mental health, and substance use among children and youth.

- **Social Capital**

  Main message: The absence of social capital networks and ties, such as inclusion in a collectivity, a family, a peer group, a church, or social organization limits children's and youth's educational potential.
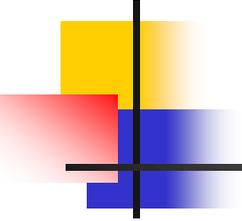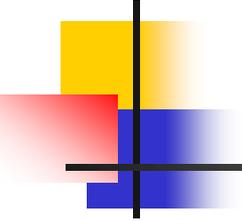
Findings: RISKS

Location:

- **Neighbourhood Effects**

  Main message: The effects of neighbourhood poverty are far reaching. Neighbourhood effects operate indirectly through parenting, housing issues, and schools.
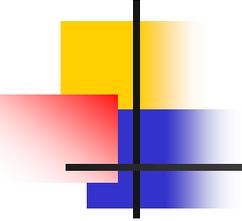
Findings:
EARLY INTERVENTIONS

- Cognitive

  Main message: Early childhood education before beginning Kindergarten has significant positive implications for cognitive development, which is directly correlated with academic achievement later in life.
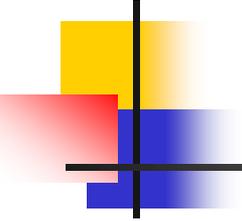
Findings:
EARLY INTERVENTIONS

- ## Kindergarten

  Main message: Kindergarten achievement predicts later school outcomes. Parents can improve outcomes by becoming involved in their child's educational careers early on.
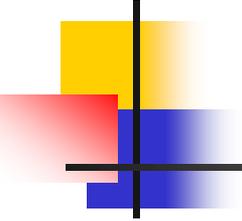
Findings:
EARLY INTERVENTIONS

- **Socio-Emotional**

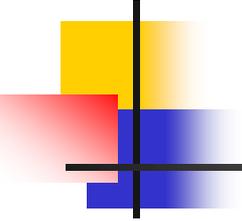 Main message: Emotional learning must be considered when designing intervention programs in early childhood.

Findings:
LATER INTERVENTIONS

- Mentoring

  Main message: For older students, mentors are significant in buffering the effects of poverty and academic difficulties, especially for youth without many resources.
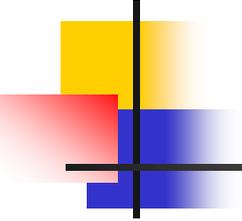
Findings:
LATER INTERVENTIONS

- Engagement

Main message: Intervention programs geared at increasing engagement among older students must consider the teacher-student dynamic by promoting collaborative learning.
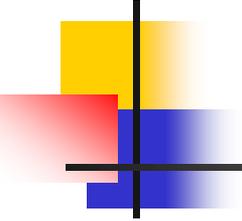
Research Gaps Identified by Stakeholders

- ## Mental Health

  Main message: Depression is a risk factor to academic achievement. In-school strategies to address depression and suicide are important for school outcomes.
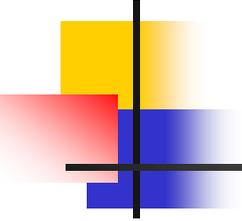
Research Gaps Identified by Stakeholders

- Drop-Outs

  Main message: There is no one common solution for addressing youth at-risk of dropping out. Drop-outs and students at-risk of dropping out require their own specialized interventions.
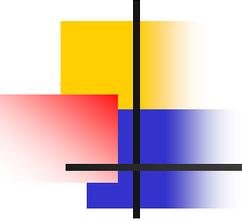
Research Gaps Identified by Stakeholders

- ## LGBTQ Youth

  Main message: LGBTQ youth struggling with feeling accepted in high school can benefit from Gay/Straight Alliances. These alliances provide an important system of support for all students and can buffer other risk factors to school outcomes such as depression.
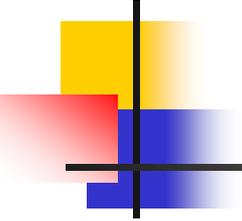
Research Gaps Identified by Stakeholders

- Fraser Mustard Early Years Study

  Main message: Developing early child development is imperative to providing children with equal opportunity to maximize their potential.
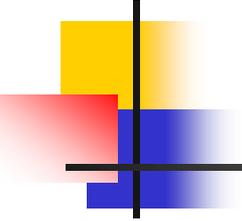
Research Gaps Identified by Stakeholders

- ## Meta-Analysis of Cognitive-Beahviour Therapy

  Main message: A link exists between cognitive processes and adjustment for dysfunctional children. Children entering treatment at more advanced levels of cognitive functioning benefit more from cognitive behavioural therapy than do children at lesser advanced levels.
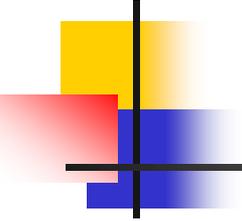
# Research Gaps Identified by Stakeholders

- ## Ontario Child Health Study

  Main message: Raises awareness of overall child health prompting change in social, health, and educational policy in Ontario. By raising the profile of children in the province, the study motivates government initiatives of child health and changes how services are delivered.

Highlights

- Individual disadvantage is reinforced by poverty

- Experiences in early childhood have life lasting effects on brain development, behaviours, and educational achievement

- Primary prevention is key
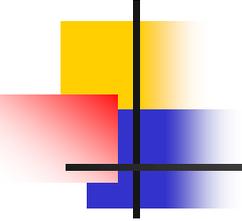
Successful Programs

- Preschool
- Parental involvement in early schooling
- After school programs with a focus on mentoring and engagement
- Collaborative learning
- In-school access to mental health supports
- Gay/Straight Alliances
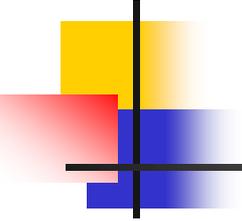
Thank you

The McMaster-Community Poverty Initiative

http://www.mcmaster.ca/povertyinitiative/index.html

Jeff Wingard, Coordinator, Labour Studies
wingard@mcmaster.ca
Vicky Maldonado, PhD Candidate, Sociology
maldonrv@mcmaster.ca