

# About Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT



## Overview

Since 2002, Reaching IN...Reaching OUT (RIRO) has been an innovator in promoting resilience on various levels—from providing evidence-based skills training programs to adults who live and work with young children to helping organizations and communities create "cultures of resilience" through training leaders and sharing important research findings and implications for practice.

Our two skills training programs, *RIRO Resiliency Skills Training* for service providers and *Bounce Back & Thrive!* (BBT) for parents are delivered through a network of RIRO and BBT Trainers who work in non-profit and government-funded organizations in Canada and beyond.

The cornerstone of RIRO's programs is training adults in resiliency skills they can role model or introduce directly in daily interactions with children under 8 years of age. In the context of caring relationships and role modeling, RIRO's programs teach adults "3Rs of Resilience" – *relaxation* and *reflection* skills to help them *respond* instead of simply reacting to challenging situations. These programs help adults and young children learn to "reach in" to think more flexibly and accurately and "reach out" to others and opportunities.

Our 12-hour resiliency skills training for service providers, and 10-session activity-based version for parents, focus on: enhancing relationships as well as supporting self-regulation (emotion and behavior); executive functioning/problem-solving; agency/mastery motivation and meaning making (optimism, participation, hope). The skills training content is consistent with the framework of world-renown resilience researcher, Dr. Anne Masten.<sup>17, 34</sup>

Based on the evaluation results of RIRO's training programs, many additional resiliency resources have been created for service providers and parents. These free resources are available on both our websites.

If you are a *service provider*, please visit "Resources" at: <http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/index.htm> to find videos, articles, reports, *ResilienC* (our quarterly e-newsbrief), resources to use with parents and more.

If you are a *parent*, please visit:

<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents.htm> to find tips, activities, videos and more to build resilience in yourself and your children

Our websites offer a vital and unique clearinghouse for people around the world wanting to learn more about building resilience and well-being in young children and families.

## Our history and development

From 2002-2012, project grants from government sources and foundations funded the first five of six inter-related phases of our development, evaluation and research.

Beginning in 1998, RIRO's founding sponsor, the Child and Family Partnership,<sup>33</sup> conducted a systematic search for best practice models to promote resilience in very young children. The Penn Resilience Program (PRP), developed by Dr. Martin Seligman and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania was chosen based on the model's evidence-base and world-wide program implementation with adults and children over eight years of age.

In 2002, RIRO received funding for Phase 1, a pilot study to adapt and test the feasibility of using key content from the PRP and adult resiliency skills training programs at the University of Pennsylvania to train Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) working with young children in child care. After receiving this training, ECEs practiced the resiliency skills in their own lives. And then, they systematically introduced the skills through role modeling and direct teaching during their daily interactions with children.

RIRO staff and ECEs worked together to create and pilot developmentally-adapted activities centred on the resiliency skill areas with children at the pilot centres. The activities were used to support children's development of the critical abilities associated with resilience discussed in Guide 2. A year later, ECEs completed structured surveys and interviews about the impact of the training on themselves, co-workers and children. The formal evaluation results were very promising and led to a larger replication in Phase 2.



Over the next several years, Reaching IN...Reaching OUT systematically developed special training programs for RIRO trainers, leaders and parents based on RIRO Resiliency Skills Training (Phases 3 to 6). Here is a brief summary of the six phases of our program development, research and evaluation:

**Phase 1 (2002-2003) – Model adaptation and testing** – multi-site pilot project to adapt University of Pennsylvania’s (Seligman) resiliency skills training for use with ECEs working with young children in child care.

**Phase 2 (2003-2006) – Multi-site and sector replication using the RIRO Resiliency Skills Training Program** (developed based on findings of Phase 1). Testing of multiple delivery models. Development of website, curriculum and video resources.

**Phase 3 (2006-2009) – Large scale evaluation of RIRO Resiliency Skills Training Program** and development/piloting/evaluation of **RIRO Trainer “Intensive” Program** (based on findings of Phases 1 & 2)

**Phase 4 (2009) – “RIRO-Wellington Reflective Leadership Training Pilot Project”** – Multi-site pilot project and formal evaluation of an enhanced version of RIRO Resiliency Skills Training with working sessions offered to leaders of child care centres. This program was created to help leaders mentor their staff to create a “culture of resilience” as a framework to guide policies, practices, hiring, professional development and resources in child care centres at multiple levels – i.e., children, staff, supervisors, parents, boards and community (based on findings of Phases 1, 2 & 3).

**Phase 5 (2010-2012) – “Resilient Parents – Resilient Kids”** – Multi-site project to **adapt RIRO Resiliency Skills Training for use with parents of young children** experiencing significant challenges and formally evaluate its impact (*Bounce Back & Thrive!*). Creation and evaluation of public awareness session, group and individual parent-child activities, videos, print and online resources and parent website to support resilience in children and families (based on Phases 1, 2, 3 & 4).

**Phase 6 (2012 to 2017) – Formal evaluation of the impact of *Bounce Back & Thrive!* (BBT) resiliency skills training programs**

**for parents** facilitated by authorized BBT Trainers in sites across Canada (based on the findings of Phases 1 to 5). Evaluation Studies #1, 2 & 3 have been completed.



In 2016, the RIRO Resiliency Skills Training program was revised and updated to include relevant information and research from the burgeoning field of resilience promotion. The revisions were done in collaboration with 23 RIRO Trainers inside and outside Canada. The new program was piloted over six months with very positive feedback from participants and trainers. The final version, launched in September 2016, has been well-received. Results of formal follow-up evaluation show the positive impact is comparable or greater than the original program.

In August 2017, RIRO Resiliency Skills Training for service providers will be available in French.

### ***Our research and evaluation***

In this section, key findings from the Phase 1 pilot study will be presented. Over more than a decade, these results have been replicated and expanded with different groups in the subsequent five phases and ongoing evaluation studies. Because of the consistency of these findings, the results of all six phases will be combined and highlighted.

One of our strengths lies in the way we use multiple ways of evaluating the processes and impact of our programs. The effectiveness of our resiliency skills training programs is formally evaluated using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. These include: formal structured surveys and scales, structured interviews, trainer/facilitator evaluations, focus groups, participant stories in written and video format and more.



## PHASE 1 (Initial Pilot Study)

Two questions guided the pilot study:

- What is the impact of the resiliency skills training if adults introduce the skills indirectly with children through role modeling?
- How early can the resiliency skills be directly introduced effectively to children through developmentally-adapted activities? (The impact of these activities was evaluated with various age groups, i.e., toddler, pre-school, and kindergarten-age children).

### Impact on Service Providers and Practice

One of the most important findings is that since receiving resiliency skills training, ECEs say their approach and language has changed when they speak with children about daily frustrations and conflicts. Before the training, they typically asked children only about their *feelings* in these situations. Now, they also ask about the children's *thinking*.

They expressed some surprise at how much young children can tell us about their thoughts, if they are asked in age-appropriate ways. Educators told us about how they uncovered children's thoughts by asking, "*What did you say to yourself?*" or "*What did you say to yourself inside your head?*"

*When a particular child was very upset about another child not playing with her, I talked to her about it. I tried not to ask, "What were you thinking?" but rather, "What did you say to yourself when N didn't want to play with you?" And, what was interesting was the child could actually say, "She doesn't like me—that's what I said to myself." So, I was getting to the actual thought behind the feelings of being very sad and upset about the friend not playing with her.*  
—LD (kindergarten)

On a comprehensive formal survey and interviews about the impact of the skills training on them and their work with children, here are some other things ECEs reported:

- This is not training that sits on the shelf. They *used the skills on a daily basis* in their centres and in their personal lives.
- They had to *learn the skills and reflect on their thinking styles before modeling* "resilient" responses during daily interactions with children.

- The resiliency skills *helped them deal with adult communication issues* (with co-workers, parents in the centres as well as their own families and friends). This resulted in *better adult communication overall*. And it *reduced job stress and increased teamwork*.

*The resiliency skills have affected every aspect of my life, both in personal relationships and as a manager. The skills give me a better understanding of where I'm coming from and help me read other people's reactions... I've just become more effective in my relationships with other adults.* —LD (supervisor)

- The skills helped them assess and *better understand child behaviour* through: greater awareness of their own *thinking styles* and use of the skills as a *framework for reflective practice*.

*The resiliency skill set has helped me refine my observation skills. It gives me another thing to look for. I'm not only looking to see, "Does this child have the fine motor skills to print?" or "Does this child have the self-regulation skills to calm himself at naptime or during a transition?" It's also helping me see, "Are the children resilient when things happen? If they have conflicts with peers, are they able to work through them? Are they able to be upset, but then they're okay later in the day? Or, do they think that their whole day has been ruined because this one thing has happened?"* —AB (kindergarten)

- They said that the resiliency thinking skills can be *modelled in daily interactions with children of any age* and should be started as early as possible. They role modeled how to deal with daily challenges by voicing out loud their thoughts, feelings and problem-solving in addition to their actions.

*If something falls and breaks, instead of showing frustration and anger, I say, "OK, we can deal with this. It's not a problem!" That's really important for children to know—that little things don't have to be such a big deal. I think, in the future, it will teach them that some bigger things can be dealt with in that sense, too.* —CP (toddlers)

- *Direct introduction of the resiliency skills*, using educator-designed skills activities (such as stories, puppet plays, drawings, and movement-



- based activities) was most effective with children four years and older. However, some verbal three-year-olds also made effective use of these activities.



### Impact on Children

- They observed *the children modeling some of the resiliency skills with their peers* such as: generating alternatives (i.e., finding other ways to look at things); catching “Always” and “Never” statements as well as calming strategies like taking deep breaths.

*M was quite upset... and said, “I never get to play with J.” One of the older children, A, was in the area and she actually said to him, “But you were playing with him this morning. Do you think you are going to play with him when you go outside today? I bet you are going to play with him outside.”*

*I heard M agreeing with A. It seemed to help him calm down and regulate his emotions, so he could focus, do something else for a while, and then have that reassurance that he would be able to play with this person again, just not right now.*  
— AB (kindergarten)

- They observed *positive changes in children, especially in impulse control and emotional regulation, which they believe is a direct result of their resiliency training.*

*Before the training, I looked at child N as a child who was having a temper tantrum, just an everyday temper tantrum—EVERY day!*

*Through the “Thought-Feeling Connections” we were able to work with her and pinpoint what was wrong. We had to start with her insecurities. We had to give her those words—we had to help her understand her feelings.*

*Now she is a wonderful, well-adjusted child who can solve her own problems and help others who are feeling the same way that she felt. —JH (preschool)*

- They reported the skills also *helped children be:*
  - less upset about making mistakes
  - more likely to persevere
  - more likely to follow through on expected behaviour
  - more empathic with peers
  - able to problem solve more effectively.

### SUMMARY: Phase 1 Pilot Study

- The adult skills help service providers personally and professionally.
- The skills can be adapted to help young children of any age.
- Educators trained in the adult skill set can learn to model these important skills successfully in their daily interactions with children of any age.
- The skills can be introduced directly through child-friendly activities with children four years and older.

(See results of Phase 1: Pilot study at [http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/documents/RIRO-Thinking\\_skills\\_and\\_resilience.pdf](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/documents/RIRO-Thinking_skills_and_resilience.pdf))



## COMBINED RESULTS (PHASES 1 - 6)

Looking at these results together helps us to better understand the key impact of our resiliency skills training programs on service providers, parents and children. (See results of all six phases at <http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/effectiveness.htm>)

From 2002 to 2016, many organizations and 2,109 participants (including 561 parents) took part in these projects and evaluation studies, and completed the full formal evaluation protocols. Here are some highlights:

### Use of resiliency skills & satisfaction

- 97% of service providers said they use the skills training regularly at work (93% outside work).
- 97% BBT parents said they use the skills at home (59% use the skills daily).
- Parents and service providers rated the training as “very useful/helpful.”
- Both said they are “very satisfied” with the training; 96% would recommend the training to others.

### Impact of resiliency skills personally

- Service providers and parents reported a significant increase in knowledge about building resilience in children and themselves.
- Major impact reported by parents & service providers:
  - Become calmer/reduce stress levels
  - Gain perspective
  - Challenge beliefs/thoughts
  - Problem-solve better
  - Improve communication with adults and children
- Service providers and parents said they have a better understanding of how they respond to challenges as well as other people.
- Parents said they:
  - believe in themselves more
  - find more positive things to appreciate
  - feel more hopeful and optimistic(These outcomes were also reported by service providers on qualitative measures.)

- Parents had a significant positive change on scales measuring:
  - attitudes related to resilience, children & parenting
  - depression & stress
- Parents doing the most poorly to start showed the greatest improvement on these scales.

### Impact of skills at work

- Service providers and leaders said the skills help them: reduce job stress, support teamwork, improve communication and promote reflective practice.
- Leaders reported they feel less burned out and stressed, have greater leadership skills and are able to mentor staff more effectively.
- Leaders said the skills increased their ability to use resilience as a framework in developing programming, resources, policies and personnel practices at their centres.

### What parents say about BBT...

*“The strategies were very useful, but I think most of all I realized that I have to work on my resilience first. This is the first great step.”*

*“I learned new things about me that translate directly to my kids. I have finally realized that the more calm and collected I act, slowly they act the same.”*

*“It makes you a better parent – relaxing your body, rethinking before you act, controlling your impulses, knowing your thinking habits...”*

*“It is so good to learn how to challenge our own and our children’s thinking. It taught me how to find my children’s strengths instead of always feeling bad about their shortcomings.”*

*“The group helped me see the child’s perspective better. It taught me to calm down and think before reacting.”*



### **How the skills helped adults help children**

- Adults reported the skills help them understand children better
- 91% say the skills helped them support positive changes in children
- 97% of adults say they role modeled the skills with children.
- Top ways the skills helped adults help children:
  - Greater understanding and empathy
  - Improved relationships
  - More positive attitudes about challenging behavior and children's uniqueness
  - Better able to see children's strengths and positives
  - Better able to assess children's thinking and behavior
  - Understand that "Calmer adults = Calmer children"

### **Impact of resiliency skills on children**

- Top changes service providers and parents observed in children:
  - Calm down easier and more patient
  - Problem solve more effectively\_
  - See mistakes as OK
  - More confident and try new things
  - Ask for help appropriately
  - Persevere
  - Empathize and help others
- 51% of service providers and 47% of parents saw the children use these skills with peers:
  - Empathize and help others calm down
  - Help others challenge their thinking/ beliefs
  - Help others generate alternatives and problem solve

### **What service providers say...**

*"This is training that every person, whether working with children or parents, needs in their lives. The adult skills are so important. Maybe the conflicts in the world will reduce if future generations get these skills taught very early in their lives." –HS (professional development coordinator)*

*"It makes you more aware of how you interact with children and how you can misread cues or situations. It teaches you to be more empathic towards children and parents – to think twice before assuming and thinking you're right." –RB (ECE-frontline, teen parents)*

*"How we role model resilience with young children on a daily basis is an essential part of their learning-it is a far more important than we realize." –CJ (center resource worker)*

*"I feel in our society it is so important to empower ourselves and children with these skills. It will affect our future success – school/ work, relationships, parenting, health..." –LP (manager, OEYC)*

### **SUMMARY**

**Based on consistent results of systematic formal evaluation and research since 2002, there is strong support for the efficacy of RIRO's resiliency skills training programs in building capacity for resilience and well-being in service providers, parents and young children living in diverse settings and communities.**

For more information, visit  
[www.reachinginreachingout.com](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com)