

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Overview and Purpose

The ECD Evaluation Project is a collaborative effort between BC Funders and communities. The purpose of the project is to create integrated evaluation and reporting systems for programs supporting healthy early childhood development. The system is based upon four long term outcomes which were adopted by the BC Early Childhood Development (ECD) Funders in 2006. These are:

1. **Mothers** are healthy and give birth to healthy **infants** who remain healthy.
2. **Children** experience healthy early child development, including optimal early learning and care.
3. **Parents and families** have the knowledge, resources and support they need to help their children develop to their full potential.
4. **Communities** support the development of all children and families.



This report deals with the evaluation of outcome #4: ***Communities support the development of all children and families.***

There are two initiatives that work specifically to build community capacity for early childhood development (ECD) in British Columbia: Children First and Success By 6. Both Children First and Success by 6 bring together community based service providers, parents and others interested in improving early childhood services and supports for families. There are significant differences in funding, structure and the operation of these two initiatives. However, both initiatives are community driven, and reflect the uniqueness of the communities in which they operate, as well as the diversity of the populations they serve. Some communities have only a Children First initiative, some communities only Success By 6 and some communities have both. The evaluation system was designed to be relevant to the goals of both Children First and Success By 6 initiatives.

Provincial partners, communities and experts worked together to develop a logic model and evaluation tools to address outcome #4. In 2007, The tools were piloted in 16 communities. Then, in 2008, the evaluation system was rolled out across the province in 60 communities. Each time improvements were made to the system and tools based upon the learnings. In 2009, 75 communities participated in the evaluation system.

The primary purpose of this report is to:

- provide evidence of the impact of capacity building work taking place in the initiatives province-wide from information gathered in the 2009 administration of the evaluation system.
- make recommendations to the initiatives, the regions and the province that can lead to strengthening the community building efforts; and
- make recommendations that can strengthen the evaluation system.

1.2 Summary of Findings from the 2009 Community Capacity Building Evaluation

The evidence from the evaluation demonstrates that community capacity for early childhood development (ECD) is being built in many communities throughout British Columbia. Community planning and coordination is being strengthened. Community awareness and mobilization is increasing and improvements in service delivery are evident. The achievements in a relatively short period of time are indeed remarkable. However, there are still many challenges at the local level and it must be recognized that community capacity for early childhood development is only one component of a larger system that affects children and families.

This section of the report summarizes the findings of the 2009 administration of the capacity building evaluation system.

Background

To address the Ultimate Outcome of: *“Communities support the development of all children and families”*, a logic model (Appendix A) was developed that outlines three intermediate outcomes used to measure progress toward this ultimate outcome in the areas of:

- **Community Planning and Coordination;**
- **Community Awareness and Mobilization; and**
- **Service Delivery.**

Community coordinators or managers of local ECD planning tables in the seventy-five participating communities (Appendix B) submitted data which detailed local activity related to the three intermediate outcomes.

Additionally, ECD managers invited participants at their community planning tables to complete online “Stakeholder Surveys”, with a view to providing some evidence of the impact of the initiatives in the same three areas. 857 stakeholders responded (Appendix C).

Data collected from the ECD initiatives was summarized by community, by MCFD Region and for the province. Summaries and raw data reports have been provided to participating communities and regional summaries to the MCFD Regions. As in previous administrations of the evaluation system, community initiatives are expected to reflect upon their reports, compare their outcomes to those of other initiatives and create and submit "Action Reports" detailing the steps they intend to take as a result of their findings. Action reports for the 2009 administration are not yet in hand and will therefore not be addressed in this report; however this aspect of the evaluation system is viewed as being the *most useful* in that it is designed to develop evaluation capacity at the local level.



An analysis of data submitted by the ECD managers and community stakeholders in 2009 has shown that community capacity is being built in the three main areas pursued by the initiatives:

Community Planning and Coordination

- Core groups of key stakeholders are participating in ECD tables throughout the province. Participants commonly include representatives from school districts, Health Authorities, community non profits and childcare/preschool providers, library and literacy groups, parents, Children First and Success By 6 initiatives. A few groups, such as faith based organizations are under-represented at the community ECD tables.
- The initiatives have been very active over the past year with significant numbers of regular meetings, subcommittee meetings and special meetings such as strategic planning sessions. It is also apparent that the use of subcommittees is common.
- Existing research, such as EDI data is commonly being utilized in ECD planning. Additionally, local research is taking place. For example, inventories of services, community asset mapping, neighbourhood specific research and research with parents are being conducted to different degrees. Encouragingly, about 20% of the initiatives have done some analysis of ECD funding in their communities. In the longer term and with regional and provincial inter-ministerial leadership and support, this type of analysis could be expected to lead towards more integrated funding systems.
- Community ECD plans are in place in the majority of reporting communities and participation in the planning processes is reflective of the make-up of the community tables. Processes undertaken in the creation of plans over the past 12 months were appropriate in a significant percentage of initiatives. It was noted that the development of timelines, budgets and evaluation plans, relative to the plans are not as prevalent as might be expected and perhaps these are still under development. Most commonly

mentioned strategic directions in the plans are appropriate to the mandate of the initiatives (raising public awareness, building collaboration, expanding community engagement).

- Participation in this evaluation process is increasing and just over half of the initiatives reported that they have engaged in the evaluation of some specific programs and projects. With limited resources, it could not be expected that the ECD tables would evaluate all community programs; however the current level of evaluation activity is increasing capacity for evaluation.
- ECD community stakeholders indicated a significant level of agreement that community partners are working well together in the areas of planning and coordination. Many provided solid evidence of the impact of their collaborative work.
- The principal challenge reported by community stakeholders related to the time constraints relative to their involvement at the community tables. In about 25% of reporting communities, initiative managers are employed for 8 hours (or fewer) weekly. Depending upon the goals of the initiatives, the combination of stakeholders working “off the sides of desks” and limited paid support positions is problematic. Reductions in funding in some areas will not make things any easier, as agency managers struggle to keep their organizations viable, while dealing with increased demand for services. The increased demand appears to be a result of the impact of the economy on families and communities as well as increased community awareness of the importance of the early years. These pressures demand even higher levels of collaboration to make the best of available resources and the initiatives will require encouragement and support to maintain momentum.

Community Awareness and Mobilization

- Local community awareness raising methods are many and varied and are primarily focussed on the range of ECD programs available to families, the research on the importance of early childhood development and the connections between early learning and school. Chief among awareness raising activities are organization and participation in community events, and the development and circulation of printed materials.
- Although ECD plans are in place in most communities, it appears that with the exception of Success By 6, Children First and school district early years funding, the level of influence over how ECD funds are allocated by ECD tables is limited. At the community level, numerous approaches to the allocation of funds are being taken by ECD tables. At the regional level, it appears very few ECD tables have influence relative to MCFD fund allocation. While some initiatives may not yet have the capacity or resources to make or recommend funding decisions relative to community identified needs, this is an area that would benefit from the development of enabling policy perhaps at a regional level. This is also an area where specific research would be beneficial – i.e. to what extent are communities able to implement local plans?

- The level of community mobilization is remarkable. Volunteers are assisting with community events, ECD programs and outreach to marginalized families. Community leaders including mayors, business and Aboriginal leaders are engaged in many communities; some very actively.
- The majority of ECD table stakeholders believe that local efforts to raise awareness of early childhood development are paying off. Stakeholders cited such things as increased demand for service, increasing media coverage, wait lists, municipal adoption of a Children's Charter, child friendly business awards, and better attendance at programs and events as evidence of impact.

Service Delivery

- Many ECD tables are engaged in activities designed to improve service coordination, service integration and service partnership. There has been significant movement towards co-location of services and the establishment of neighbourhood service hubs. Both managers and stakeholders provided evidence of new and/or improved programs that have resulted from local research and community partnership. Opportunities for joint training and mentoring are being widely pursued.
- In 25% of reporting communities, Memoranda of Understanding (MOU's) are in place; some between different funders of ECD services, some amongst community agencies, and some involving Aboriginal communities. If details of these types of agreements are not already being shared, it might be useful to the different communities and regions to create some sort of repository that could be accessed by initiatives that are preparing for this step towards more integrated systems.
- Initiatives to reduce barriers to service access particularly for low income and Aboriginal families are in place in many communities. Stakeholders cited the establishment of free programs, the provision of transportation or transportation assistance, subsidies for recreational programs. etc. The array of examples provided by stakeholders included some very creative and "community made" solutions that could likely not have been achieved without very real community engagement and partnership.



Community Trends

Initiative managers were asked to comment on major social, economic or political changes that have occurred in communities (or BC overall) in the last 12 months that have impacted the ability of ECD community planning tables to make a difference for children and their families. Responses paint a somewhat bleak picture; it appears that the “trickle down” effect of the economic downturn is creating a great deal of stress on communities and families as well as child and family serving systems.

- The most common changes identified relate to the impact of the downturn in the economy that has affected tourism and resource industries. Many managers detailed the significant impact on families and on services.
- A number of Managers commented on reductions in funding and or the availability of funding from a variety of sources for ECD work. Managers also commented on the lack of childcare, cost of childcare, shortage of early childhood professionals, and political influences. In some cases, comments regarding the latter were positive.
- On the brighter side, 10 Managers reported on positive changes in their communities. These comments included 2 communities where EDI results have improved, and there were improvements in funding for Children First.
- Other comments related to the high child poverty rate in BC and reductions in service (Public Health).



Conclusions

This evaluation system measures the progress of the ECD initiatives towards an increased capacity to support young children and families, and this report serves as a benchmark for future measurement. The concept of community capacity building acknowledges that with proper support and resources, people and communities can manage their own concerns. It is known that community capacity is a vital factor in promoting the

health and well-being of families. Community capacity includes the ability to “develop and sustain strong relationships; solve problems; make group decisions and collaborate effectively to identify goals and get work done”¹. Community capacity *building* focuses on processes that build upon existing strengths and develop the social capital that is necessary for communities to address specific issues faced by individuals, families and organizations. It is not the achievement of tasks associated with these issues.

¹ Mattesich, P and Monsey, B. “Community Building” for Amherst Wilder Foundation, 1997

Given the foregoing, the ECD initiatives have provided sufficient detail of activity and impact to reliably demonstrate that overall, they are indeed increasing local capacity. Around the province, more than a thousand people are directly involved in the processes of developing and sustaining relationships, solving problems, making group decisions, and collaborating to identify goals and get work done. They are working together to improve coordination; they are researching and planning to address community needs; they are raising awareness of the importance of the early years and they are working to improve access to services by young children and families - in particular the most marginalized groups. Through this work, social capital is being built and a "power of possibility" for self determination by communities has been unleashed around the province.

Community capacity is one component of many systems that affect children and families. It must be recognized that regardless of the strength of a community's capacity, there are not always local solutions to local problems. Systemically, communities are "nested" in larger systems where municipal, regional, provincial or national changes in policies, approaches, and resource allocations have impact. On one hand, it is now widely accepted that the community dimension most strongly embodies the principles of health promotion in that it directly affects the ability of people having control over their own health and its determinants. On the other hand, "top down" approaches are still dominant and it will take time for larger, more complex systems to develop the synergy that is required to support self-determination. The community initiatives provide a new platform for the development of this synergy.

The current state of the economy is having an effect on the capacity of systems at all levels. In the next few years it may be difficult for the ECD initiatives to maintain momentum as communities, agencies and individuals struggle to simply make ends meet. This situation makes it essential to enhance local ability to make the best possible use of available resources.

Finally, it is hoped that this report will serve to encourage the ECD initiatives to persevere in their work to strengthen community capacity and to assure policy makers that the investment in capacity building is well worth continuing and enhancing wherever possible.

"As networks grow and transform into active, working communities of practice, we discover how life truly changes, which is through emergence. When separate, local efforts connect with each other as networks, then strengthen as communities of practice, suddenly and surprisingly a new system emerges at a greater level of scale. This system of influence possesses qualities and capacities that were unknown in the individuals. It isn't that they were hidden; they simply don't exist until the system emerges. They are properties of the system, not the individual, but once there, individuals possess them. And the system that emerges always possesses greater power and influence than is possible through planned, incremental change. Emergence is how life creates radical change and takes things to scale."

**Dr Margaret Wheatley &
Deborah Frieze, 2006**

1.3 Findings related to the evaluation system

This section of the report documents how the evaluation project has met its objectives, and reports on data quality/quantity issues that have arisen in this iteration of the evaluation process.

How the evaluation project has met its objectives

The evaluation project has five objectives:

1. To build local evaluation capacity of ECD community building initiatives around BC;
2. To develop a logic model, data collection tools and reporting templates that could be used by ECD community building initiatives in BC;
3. To pilot test the logic model, data collection tools and reporting templates with a diverse cross-section of BC communities;
4. To ensure that the evaluation tools and process are useful for program improvement, and
5. To provide evidence of the success of community capacity building initiatives, locally, regionally and provincially.

This review and a review of the 2008 Community Action reports demonstrates that the system has met or is meeting objectives 1-4 and provides evidence relative to objective #5. Ongoing monitoring of objective #5 will be very important to rationalizing the continuation of the evaluation system.

Data Quality

A review of data quality showed that:

- For the most part, answers provided by initiative managers yielded the types of baseline data that should prove useful for the purposes of future measurement. Some changes to the Managers Survey are indicated and these are detailed in the body of this report.
- The use of a 5 point Likert scale in stakeholder surveys provides better data quality than an "Agree", "Disagree", "Don't know" format.
- There is ample evidence of the impact of the early years community capacity building work.
- For the most part, stakeholders were very satisfied with the survey format and content, more particularly with the "short form" survey employed in part in 2009.

1.4 Recommendations

To the community ECD initiatives:

The following recommendations are offered with a great deal of respect for the work that is taking place around the province, with the knowledge that many initiatives are new and/or under resourced, and with an understanding that much of the work is being done “off the corners of desks.”

1. Continue the work to broaden representation at the ECD tables, paying special attention to involving: parents as advisors and in neighbourhood specific research, faith based organizations (which are likely to share in the workload), and marginalized communities. Wherever possible, “hand off” local initiatives to the community – the larger the network you build, the more the community is invested and the lighter your load.



2. When making decisions about how to target resources as a result of EDI results, ensure wherever possible that there are also universal programs adequate to meet the early childhood needs of all families.
3. Continue the work towards more integrated systems at the community level, including integrated funding streams.
4. Ensure that community ECD plans have timelines and monitoring/evaluation processes and other elements described in the Children First Strategic Planning Guide.
5. Ensure that the Community Action Plans developed as a result of this evaluation system are inclusive of the input from community table stakeholders, and that resulting action is monitored. Ensure that stakeholders are aware of the purpose of the evaluation and how it links to the Action Plans.
6. Ensure that succession plans are in place, particularly for the replacement of local Managers.
7. Ensure that wherever possible, sub committees engage in activities that bring information to the ECD table as a whole for decision-making, rather than making independent decisions that affect the holism of the table. Where “action teams” or work-groups are formed to accomplish a particular task, ensure that these groups are guided by the table as a whole.

8. Pursue evaluation of the work of your initiatives and systems to evaluate local ECD programs and services, and use the results of evaluation for improvement.
9. Continue the work to reduce barriers to service access, paying some attention to smaller groups who may be isolated (e.g. children with special needs, Aboriginal families, immigrants and refugees in small communities).
10. Create a repository of existing MOU's that can be shared amongst the initiatives and evaluate the effectiveness of these with respect to community development.

To the MCFD Regions

These recommendations are respectfully offered with an understanding that there are significant funding pressures at this time as well as pressure to respond to provincial priorities:

1. Consider/re-consider the investment in community capacity building, relative to the findings in this report. Would an increased investment lead to even greater impact and more opportunities for community commitment to supporting young children and families?
2. Work with other funders of early childhood services and the local initiatives towards policies that will enable an ECD funding system that is integrated with comprehensive community plans.
3. Contribute to developing the ability to deliver evidence based programs with sound evaluation processes at the community level.

To the Ministry of Children and Family Development

1. The foresight shown in bringing about the Success By Six and Children First community development initiatives is bearing fruit. Continue to assist and encourage communities and regions to build local capacity to identify and address community needs.

To the ECD Integrated Evaluation Project Management

With respect to data quality/quantity in the Manager Survey it is recommended that:

1. Consideration is given to making changes to the questions in the Manager Survey as outlined in section 4.1.1.

With respect to data quality/quantity in the Stakeholder Survey it is recommended that:

2. The long form Stakeholder Survey is replaced by the short form.
3. Feedback is sought from funding entities, regional authorities, the community based ECD initiatives and advocates for improved services to young children and families as to the adequacy of data yielded by the Stakeholder and Manager Surveys
4. Other ways to ascertain the level of community wide awareness are pursued (e.g. Angus Reid polls) whenever resources are available to do so.

With respect to the evaluation system, it is recommended that:

5. Community Action reports are reviewed to ensure that the system continues to be productive.
6. Further discussion of how and when this system will be implemented in the future takes place with stakeholders and with this review in mind.

