

A Continuum of Supports and Services in the Early Years

Building a Strong
Foundation for
Our Future



United Way
Alberta Capital Region
Change starts here.

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to Alberta Education for providing funding for the Early Years Continuum Project in 2010. We commend the Ministry for recognizing that we all learn along a continuum which starts long before formal schooling and has an impact throughout our lives.

This project has provided the opportunity to imagine a strong continuum of supports for children and families, to learn as communities and to share our individual and collective wisdom toward common goals.

It is important to acknowledge the champions in our communities throughout Alberta, and specifically connected to the Early Years Continuum Project for their tireless efforts to work collectively, to build awareness and understanding and to engage parents in developing a better future for all children.

Thank you to everyone who was part of creating new knowledge, increasing capacity of individuals and communities to create change and for championing the early years.

Special appreciation goes to Dr. Michael Quinn Patton and Dr. Clyde Hertzman for being expert advisors to the evaluation team.

During the project time, Dr. Hertzman passed away. With the loss of such an amazing champion for young children, we must ask ourselves, "How can we answer his call to action to provide the best start for our children?" We would like to encourage each person reading this report to ask this same question and pledge to be an early years champion!

Funded By Alberta Education



Introduction

ALBERTA IS KNOWN FOR ITS

creativity and innovation. As our province builds a “made in Alberta approach” to early childhood development, we have an opportunity to create a strong continuum of supports that will ensure all members of our community are able to participate and contribute in ways that will benefit us all.

Research shows that significant brain development takes place in the first six years of life and sets the foundation for learning throughout our lives. Much like building a house, the basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Early experiences literally shape how the brain gets built; a strong foundation in the early years increases the

probability of positive outcomes. As a community, providing the best opportunities for healthy growth and development in the early years is one way to ensure we have engaged, productive and contributing members now and in the future.

Children’s brains develop best in strong, nurturing relationships. The interactive influences of genes and experiences shape the forming brain. These relationships buffer toxic stress, and include a “serve and return” process where children’s attempts to interact with adults are met with attention and returned, much like serving and returning a ball in a game of tennis. When children lack these interactions, they have less opportunity to develop their brains in critical ways.

*As a community,
we all have a role
to play to ensure
children have the
environments and
experiences they
need to help them
learn, develop
and thrive.*

Through the Early Years Continuum Project, communities have explored strategies that increase access to positive experiences, and decrease barriers for families with young children so they are able to connect easily and effectively across a continuum of supports from birth to school entry and beyond.



Purpose

We are moving to an understanding of the breadth of resources and depth... All the tools have been great; all the brochures and information. It's like a quilt of care.

Service provider



THE PURPOSE OF THE EARLY YEARS CONTINUUM PROJECT (EYCP)

was to learn how to create and sustain a comprehensive continuum of community supports for families with young children (prenatal to school entry). The project engaged three Alberta communities to better understand the essential qualities of family and community environments necessary for healthy early childhood development (ECD); to identify needs and challenges, assets and opportunities; and, create strategies to establish effective continuums of services and supports for families.

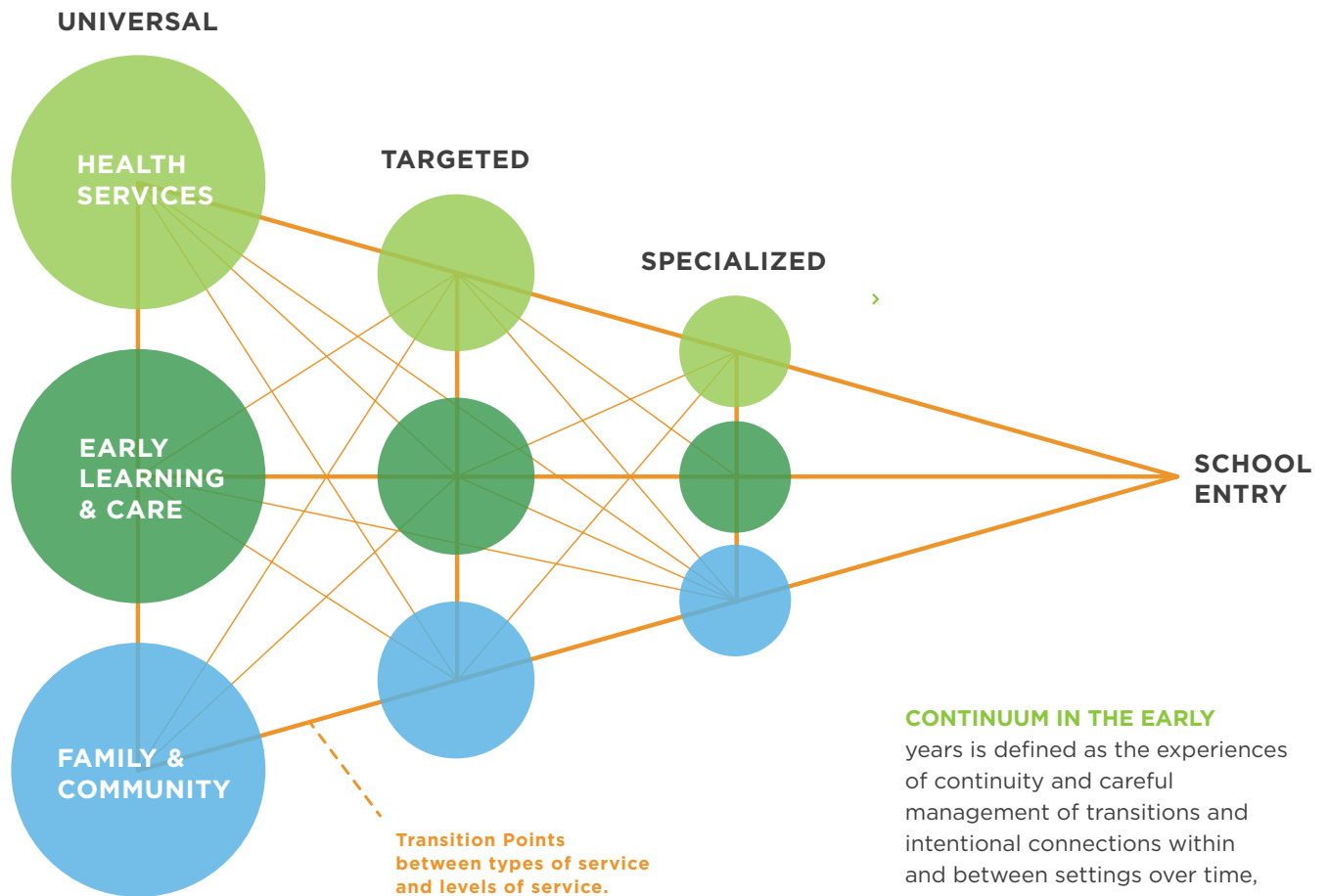
OVERARCHING GOALS:

- Families and children have access to a comprehensive range of early learning and care services in their communities;
- Children have opportunities to build a strong foundation of learning and development prior to beginning school; and,
- Parents needs and interests inform decisions regarding environments to support their child's healthy development.

ADDITIONAL CROSS CUTTING GOALS:

- Communities develop capacities for creating change; and
- Increased capacity for evaluation, communication and translating learning to inform change in practice and policies.

Continuum Framework



CONTINUUM IN THE EARLY

years is defined as the experiences of continuity and careful management of transitions and intentional connections within and between settings over time, starting prenatally and through to school entry. When defined this way, the focus shifts from the service provider to a focus on the experience of the child and family.

Provincial Project Focus

“Before people just sat back, ‘That’s the way it is.’ People are finally motivated, with a voice, and a platform, bringing groups together with a plan.”

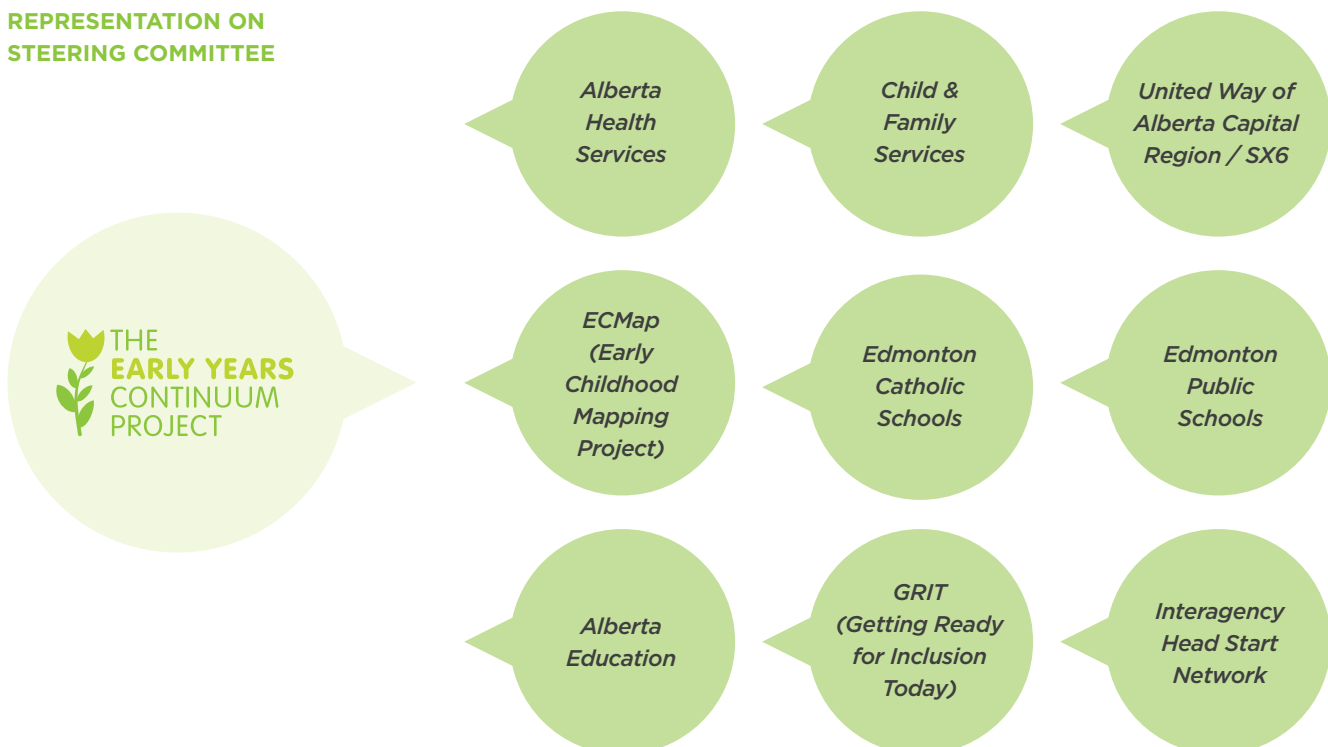
Parent

A PROVINCIAL-LEVEL STEERING

Committee oversaw the project. The committee had three main areas of focus and responsibility: **Linking and Leveraging** — utilizing Steering Committee members’ existing networks and spheres of influence, create dialogue between sites and broader stakeholder networks to linking findings from this project to broader regional and provincial initiatives; **Building Capacity** — within and across project sites as well as within the Steering Committee, and; **Knowledge mobilization** — to create greater understanding of the current models of service delivery in Alberta and other jurisdictions and to translate and disseminate learning gained.

As a project with the purpose of learning how to create and sustain a comprehensive continuum of community supports for families with young children, the intent was to gather the wisdom of community, not to create more programs. The project was grounded in the ecological model of child development in which the child first develops within the context of families, nestled within community which encompasses early learning and care services for young children. Each of these is influenced by government systems.

REPRESENTATION ON STEERING COMMITTEE



Three main areas of focus:

1. LINKING AND LEVERAGING

Activities such as:

- The Project co-hosted Better Beginnings Better Future training and presentations for stakeholders connected to early learning and care along with Early Childhood Development Support Services. The training supported both EYCP Coordinators as well as Early Childhood Mapping (ECMap) Coordinators.
- A day of presentations from eight distinct provincial and regional Early Childhood initiatives was hosted by EYCP to enable cross dissemination of findings and increased opportunities to partner where appropriate. (Linking and Leveraging Day). This event inspired a linking and leveraging document created by Edmonton ECMap coordinator. earlychildhoodedmonton.ca
- Worked collaboratively with Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta Child Care Study to co-conduct four focus groups for parents around the experiences accessing Child Care.
- Analysis of the Child Care Study findings provided parent voice to the dialogue around Early Childhood Development Provincial Framework created by Muttart Foundation and forums previously co-hosted for system leaders by Muttart Foundation, Success By 6® and Calgary Upstart Champions for Children and Youth.

University of Alberta Child Care Study Findings:

- Mothers in our study were knowledgeable about the early learning services available in their communities, and considered carefully the kinds of services they used.
- Early childhood coalitions, family support centers, Parent Link centers, pre-school initiatives, mother-tot programs, etc. are utilized and important to families. However, a number of gaps in service are also evident. One concern was a lack of quality, accessible and affordable child care.

THE ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF THE EYCP



Underlying values:

- Child and Family at the Centre
- Community Led
- Parent Informed
- Inclusive
- Innovative
- Connected
- Local learning informs larger system change



The project has found ways to make awareness of services easier to come by and to make it work for you. Having someone in the community help as a ‘navigator’ makes a big difference.

Service provider

2. BUILDING CAPACITY

Activities such as:

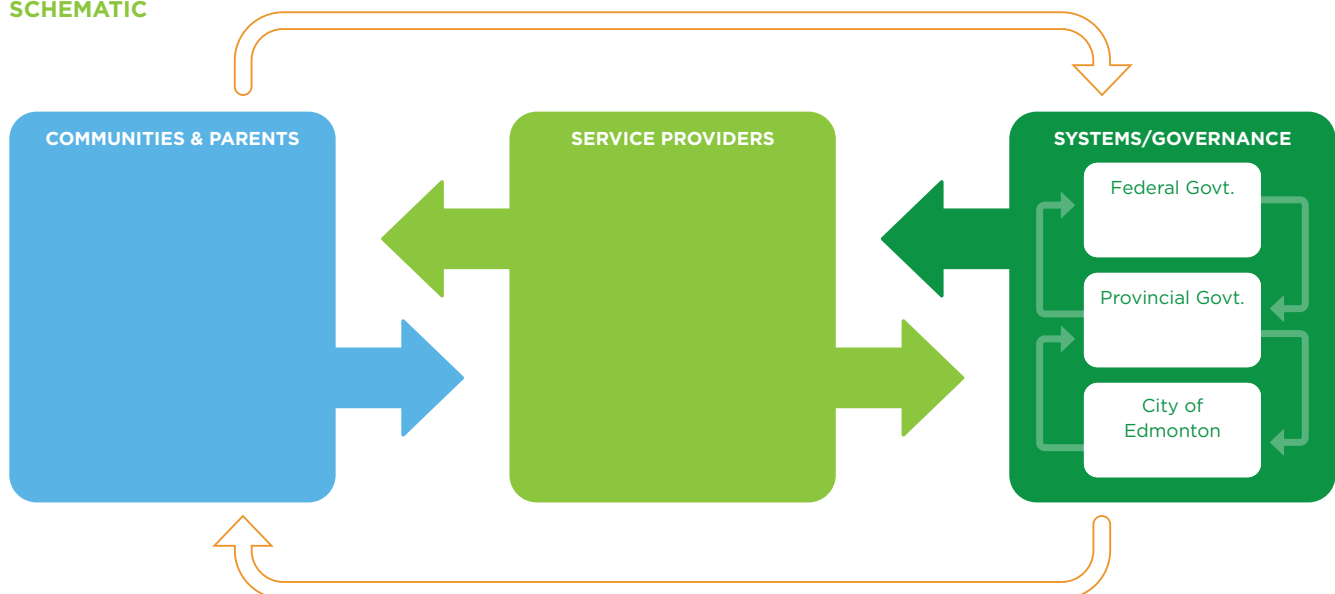
- Supported GRIT (Getting Ready for Inclusion Today) training in High Prairie to increase capacity of the community to support children’s development, particularly those who may be experiencing challenges. This partnership utilized the expertise developed as part of the Access Supports and Participation (ASAP) project.
- A graduate student from the University of Alberta, School of Population Public Health, was engaged to support evaluation work. The student further extended his learning by researching early child development and the longitudinal impact of poverty.

3. KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

Activities such as:

- A **communication schematic** (below) was developed to generate discussion regarding target audiences.
- A literature review was conducted to articulate the current state of early learning and care environments and system delivery within Alberta and examine service delivery in other jurisdictions.
- Parent and Service Provider handouts were created to communicate the importance of the early years and were disseminated at events as an engagement tool.
- Presentations at conferences and events for broad audiences have been utilized to share information about Continuums as well as the preliminary findings of the project.

COMMUNICATION SCHEMATIC



Community Focus for Learning

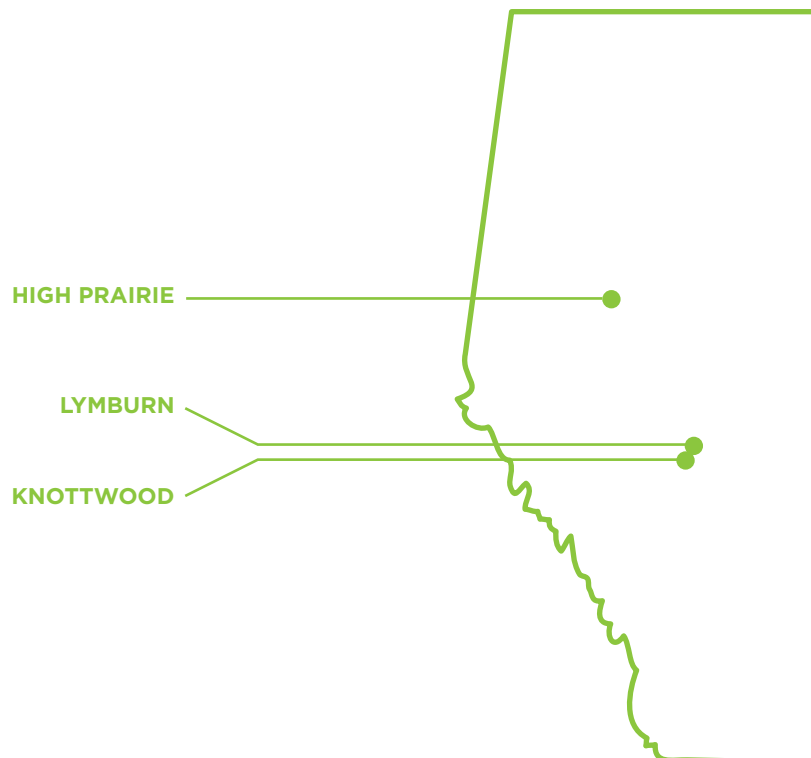
THREE ALBERTA COMMUNITIES were selected to be part of the Early Years Continuum Project:

- **High Prairie**
- **Lymburn**
- **Knottwood**

Each community undertook their own journey of identifying ways to build stronger and more comprehensive systems of support for families with young children, ways to build stronger bridges between early childhood and the school system, and improve their ability as a community to support children's development in the early years. Each site is unique and distinct in its demographics,

geography, (one rural, two urban), socio-economic status, EDI scores as well as services available and service delivery.

We wanted to learn from community and utilize that information to inform and influence practice across Alberta. The project did not limit the communities exploration to one form of continuum – they used integration elements for both “no wrong door” and hub model of approaches. We learned that together, these two strategies work very well to broaden the reach to families with young children, and the effectiveness of the services available.



EYCP linked to the work of ECMap and used EDI data to engage community and increase awareness of the importance of the early years.

What is the Early Development Instrument (EDI)?

- The EDI is a questionnaire completed by Kindergarten teachers across the Province
- The EDI gathers information about children's development in their early years
- The EDI data allows us to understand trends in child development across the Province that can help shape decision-making, planning, programs and policy
- The questionnaire has 104 questions and measures five core areas of early child development that are known to be good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes

To find out more about child development in your community, visit ecmap.ca.

High Prairie, Alberta

Building Community Capacity

Focus: Better support for children at risk for developmental delays and their families during key transitions in their early years.

Overview

High Prairie, a rural community located 4 1/2 hours north of Edmonton, was keen to participate in this project. Representatives from the local School District first contacted Alberta Education expressing interest in exploring ways to strengthen services and supports to young children in their community, and a connection to the project was made.

There was particular concern regarding the high number of children entering kindergarten and school with developmental delays that were undetected and undiagnosed, where the child or family had received little or no services prior to school entry. With the focus on early intervention and exploring the needs of children with developmental delays, a staff person with Alberta Health Services Early Intervention Program, 'Show Me', was recruited to be the local site coordinator for the project in High Prairie.

Who was involved

SITE COORDINATOR:

- **Necole Screpnek**, Alberta Health Services, Early Interventionist
- **Lindsay Davies**, Executive Director, High Prairie & Region Children's Resource Council

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE, PRIMARILY MANAGEMENT FROM:

- High Prairie School Division No. 48
- Holy Family Catholic Regional Division No. 37
- Human Services, Region 8
- Alberta Health Services
- St. Andrew's School
- Children's Resource Centre
- Peavine Aboriginal Head Start
- ECMap Coalition

ADVISORY COMMITTEE CONSISTED OF:

- Local early childhood development front line staff and service providers (this group later evolved in to the Brown Bag Lunch group)



Primary activities and actions

Development of an Early Years

Directory: The creation of a directory led to synergy between partners and new collaborations. Distribution of the directory created opportunities for further connections within community and with outlying communities. For the first time, there is a resource available for families to better understand the range of supports and services available. Service providers also have a resource to support their work in connecting families across a continuum of needs.



A family rushed to Edmonton due to birth complications was given the resource directory to link to supports back home in High Prairie by staff at the Glenrose Hospital.

Doula project: Since all babies are born outside of the community, it was identified that a gap in connecting with families was created from the start. High Prairie started to support healthy pregnancies and link pre/post natal support services locally as a way to enhance their continuum.

Service Pathways: Community engagement and conversations to develop service delivery pathways increased awareness of the need for access to the right service at the right time, and the importance of seamless service delivery. Particular focus was placed on early identification and supporting children at risk for developmental delays.

Promising Practice: What worked

As a community, through the diligent work of committed Early Childhood Champions, High Prairie embraced and brought voice to the importance of the early years. Every community event; the annual rodeo, the annual Sportsman and Fishing show, Christmas light up, and summer Street festival, became opportunities to engage and promote “Play Today” messaging. By exploring their community using “Photovoice”, parents and service providers became advocates in the civic elections for the first time ever. Now, Early Childhood is on the agenda at the local governance level.



The EYCP partners worked together to provide an Early Years Exposition. In total, over 240 families participated, including newly elected community leaders. Over 35 volunteers and community service provider partners from all levels of service provision and administration took part in the expo and worked with families. In addition, over 17 businesses participated to showcase what the community's businesses could offer families. Governance partners, service providers, the business community and local government actively worked together to support an initiative to engage families, children with special needs and parents into a continuum of service in health, learning, human services and community.

In the last two years in High Prairie a new movement has occurred. People are talking about families and children, they are motivated to improve the community, build good governance and, best of all, they are working together. Day by day and event by event more people take notice and want to be involved somewhere in the life of children.

Service Providers Reported:

78% easier to make referrals and to get needed information to families.

44% referrals to other agencies have increased.

67% increase in ability to get resources for families

Evaluation: Impact of Activities

Building stronger networks and raising community awareness creates positive continuums of supports for young children and their families:



In the midst of all this... a first time, anxious new mother was meeting with her Doula and travelling back and forth to Doctor's appointments in Peace River, an hour and a half away. Baby was late to arrive but the nervous mother and family were reassured with support and information that everything was fine. On October 24th after 18 hours of continuous support from her Doula, "Kieran" was born in Grande Prairie, over two hours from home but with our High Prairie Doula, her partner and her mother by her side. On October 26th the new mother and her family attended the Early Years Expo in High Prairie and were happy to be home.

Excerpt from: High Prairie EYCP – Our Big Change for Little People Story

Community work that continues

- Children's Resource Council and Show Me program staff continue to work collaboratively and share training opportunities.
- Cross-sectoral service provider gatherings (Brown Bag Lunch) continue with community support.
- Ongoing engagement of parents, community partners and outlying communities continues with further updating and distribution of the "Service Pathways" and Resource Directory documents.
- Children's Expo will be offered in the community every second year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to work to engage partners that are not at the table.
- Work with Public Health and Child and Family services to connect children at risk for developmental delay to ECD services, particularly the gap between 18 months and school entry.
- Develop links with the business community.
- Continue to bring voice to early childhood issues in political arenas.

Lymburn and area, Edmonton, Alberta



Overview

The community of Lymburn, located in west Edmonton, created “Discovering Lymburn” after the original EDI pilot and ran for two years before expanding in to “Discovering West Edmonton”. This collective was actively engaging in community conversations as a way to connect with parents and service providers to talk about what they wanted to have happen. With a focus on young children and their families, “Discovering West Edmonton” expanded to include two more communities and created CLOC (Callingwood, Lymburn, and Ormsby Communities). It was at this time that Lymburn, as part of the CLOC network, became a second site for EYCP.

Maria Montgomery was working as a facilitator at the beginning of Discovering Lymburn and was in a unique 3R's (Resources + Relationships = Resiliency) position in Lymburn school. She was already serving in the role of community animator and navigator so her role expanded to become the EYCP site coordinator. It was a perfect fit.

The CLOC Steering Committee determined the place to start to create a stronger continuum of supports for families and children was to strengthen the connections and understanding between service providers. To achieve this “Brown Bag Lunch” gatherings were created and held once a month at the Public Library.

Who was involved

SITE COORDINATOR:

- **Maria Montgomery**, working in community capacity building 3R position with Alta Care
- **Stephanie Basker**, “Health for 2” with Parent Link

ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

- Alta Care Resources
- West Edmonton Parent Link
- Discovering Lymburn and Area
- Mayfield Early Learning
- Community Options
- Alberta Health Services
- Edmonton Public Library
- The GRIT Program
- City of Edmonton
- Centre for Family Literacy
- Lymburn Elementary
- St. Martha Elementary
- Jamie Platz YMCA
- ECMap Coalition
- ABC Headstart
- Children and Family Services

Leveraging and Strengthening Connections

Focus: Linking existing services to build on strengths, address gaps in the continuum, and enhance models of service delivery.

“As a group, we have aspired to honor the unique creativity and talents of each other and have begun to capitalize on them with a global goal in mind; to create better access to appropriate programs and resources for parents, youth and children in our community.

Primary activities and actions

Brown Bag Lunches (BBL):

Lymburn and Area created intersectoral community service provider meetings (now called Building Better Linkages), which helped to build solid relationships and understanding so each community service provider knew what the other services providers did and offered. These relationships led to innovation and partnering in order to ensure supportive transitions and community events.

Community Hubs: The focus on hubs of service became “Centers of Community Connections” and places of collaboration for parents and service providers to share information and support. Various locations were explored for connection centres, such as schools, libraries, Parent Links, community halls — all natural places where parents gather. There was intentional co-location of programs and services for families. For example, Edmonton Public

Library started going to evening immunization clinics with Alberta Health Services to reach newly landed immigrant families.



Site coordinator and school child and family liaison staff co-facilitate Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) at school for the first time. This program gives parents simple and practical strategies to help them confidently manage their children's behaviour, prevent problems developing and build strong, healthy relationships.

Appreciative Inquiry: Cross-sector training was provided on the use of Appreciative Inquiry for community conversations. It was the method used in conducting parent surveys, parent engagement and dialogue.



Promising Practice: What worked

"When I talk to families, I have a mental checklist of all the people who sit around this (BBL) table. Now we have this list of services (directory) so all our staff will have the same information about services for families and young children"

Focus Group participant

"This project has been a people connector. The anonymity in a system can lead to all kinds of slipping sideways. Now I feel comfortable that I know a face, and they can give me a hand and that makes a huge difference for the families we serve"

Focus Group participant.

"Over the last 3 years we have watched participation at community events grow from 40 to 200 this year and heard more parents say that they feel more connected to their community... everyone is included... we are having a big opening of the new playground and now the library is automatically included."

Community Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT) Response

Service Providers Reported:

63% easier to make referrals

63% referrals to other agencies have increased

50% increase in ability to get resources for families

100% noted an increase in their ability to get needed information for families

ENGAGING COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPATING IN EVENTS:





Our Brown Bag Group is a team of grassroots professionals who reflect the parent voice, the child's voice and the community's voice and we have come together not only to share those voices with others, but to act upon them. This is our significant success; we have created exciting relationships in our community that we believe will be sustainable and which have changed the way we work together.

Evaluation: Impact of Activities

- Creating community connections and supporting these connections takes dedicated time and energy.
- Identifying the groups that are missing and acting to engage them is essential.
- Collaboration provides opportunity; collaboration provides authenticity; collaboration builds trust, encourages cooperation and shares leadership.
- Working together in collaboration gathers diversity of perspective in services for children and families.
- We can create stronger supports to the community when we are sharing resources, ideas, referrals and capacities with each other.
- Working together increases our ability to leverage strengths, assets and capacities within the community.

Community work that continues

- As a community, CLOC values the important work of the 'community navigator and champion' and will be expanding the 3R's position within Alta Care agency.
- The BBL (Better Building Linkages) opportunities for networking and collaboration will continue by rotating locations within the community and chairperson responsibilities.
- Lymburn Days is now being carried on by linking with existing community events.
- Ormsby Hall continues to be a site for community activities.
- A "Community of Practice" is being developed by those using Appreciative Inquiry.

Knottwood, Edmonton, Alberta



Overview

Knottwood is a community in southeast Edmonton. With the changing demographics of the community and lagging participation in the Knottwood Community League, the league was already actively engaging community in surveys to determine what was needed. Parents expressed a sense of isolation and not knowing where to turn for resources and activities.

Knottwood, through information on their local EDI data, were aware that young children in the community were experiencing some challenges. Seeing EYCP as an opportunity to further engage parents and community, Knottwood became the third project site.

In response to community need as indicated in surveys, the Knottwood site focused on parent engagement and involvement and created "Parents as Champions", a parent group that met once a month at the community hall. The parents explored and created opportunities for themselves to have a stronger continuum of support and connection in order to parent their young children. The community development worker, who herself is a parent of young children and had been involved with the original community surveys was hired as the site coordinator through the Knottwood Community League.

Who was involved

SITE COORDINATOR:

- **Shireen Mears**, hired by Knottwood Community League
- **Leah Day**, administrative support

KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

- Community parents/caregivers formed "Parents as Champions", a core group of parents. This group expanded their network by engaging with:
- Knottwood Community League utilizing local media
 - Knottwood Tots Group and Playschool
 - ECMap Coalition
 - 5 Knottwood Schools: Satoo, Menisa, Ekota, Dan Knott, J Percy Page
 - Family Resource Center
 - Edmonton Public Library
 - City of Edmonton
 - Alberta Health Services

Parents As Champions

Focus: Building a stronger continuum of supports from a parent perspective.

Parents have felt empowered through the parent-led approach that our project deliberately chose to take.... Parents gain confidence in their ability to take part in complex discussions and to recognize that their ‘voice’ matters as part of the bigger picture of developing a framework for early childhood development in the province.

Primary activities and actions

Parent Group: Knottwood created a parent group ‘Parents as Champions’ to engage parents and identify parent needs for local continuum supports.

Activities: Innovative responses were identified based on parent interest. A Parent Book Club for example, engaged the public library in supporting parents understanding of children’s literature as well as parenting resource books. A babysitting club engaged local teens and parents to build relationships and ensure training of a pool of talented and trusted young people could become part of the continuum of supports.

Events: Linking to and expanding on existing Community League events was a focus as well as creating parent focused events to strengthen local networks.

Learning: With a focus on increasing community and parent capacity; community based learning opportunities related to early learning and child development were provided.

Promising Practice: what worked

“Through the project, parents have been given the opportunity to come together regularly in a neutral, safe and welcoming place which has helped to foster relationships. These relationships have built a stronger awareness between parents of common needs and an appreciation of differences that exist within families. Ultimately these relationships have created trust between parents and a sense of belonging.”



Four parents involved in early years project put names forward to sit on the local community league executive.

Evaluation: Impact of Activities

"Due to the parent groups we've had, we now look at every other child we walk by as our own. Those children have been brought in to the fold because we say, 'OK., you're our target.' We look at that child who is lost, or the one who may need more support and say 'that is who we need to support in our next meeting.' We are looking proactively at the community.... Not just my family, but something done to help the others."

Focus group participant

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Build on community events.
- Hold events in schools.
- Engage parents in decisions.
- Report impact – let community know how their voice is making a difference.

Community work that continues

- Knottwood Community League continues to support the 'Babysitting Club' with internal resources.
- Edmonton Public Library continues to offer Parent Book Club.
- Knottwood Community League will be the contact for the future "I've Outgrown It Sale"
- Partnerships with Family Resource Center continue as Shireen, site coordinator, will be offering parenting programs with the center.

Through its design and evolution, we believe the EYCP adds a unique and valuable contribution to the overall work being done through various ministries and initiatives by providing focused attention on, and inclusion of, the parent voice.

Focus Group Participant



Evaluation

Measuring Impact

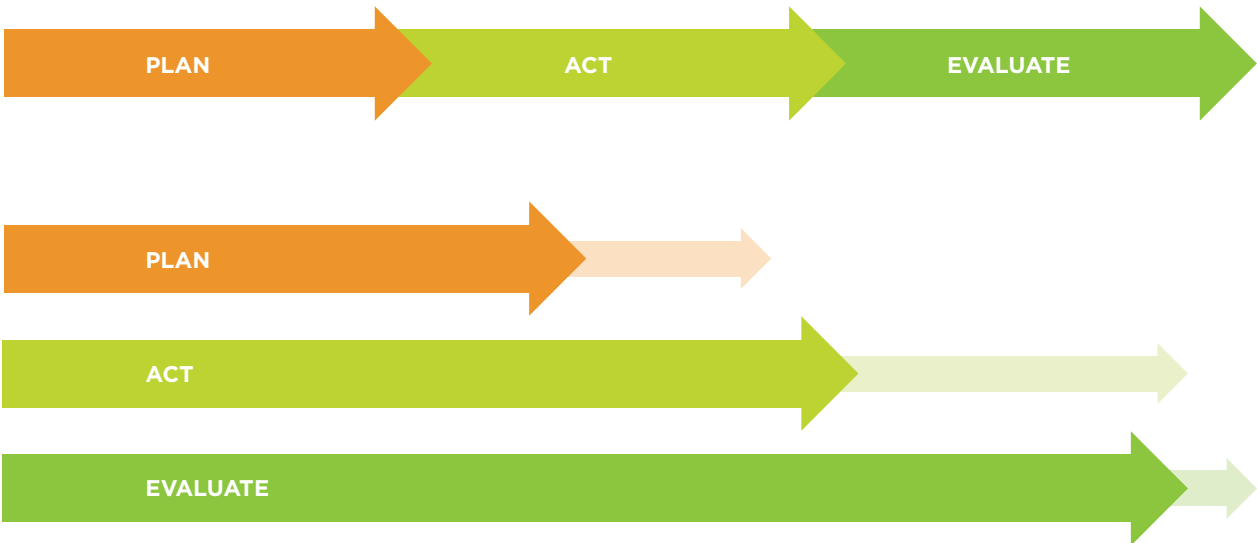
“This has been an evolving practice ... We look at what is emerging and adjust according to this direction.”

PCAT qualitative data

EVALUATION WAS CONDUCTED by E. Krupa Research and Development Inc. contracted through the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research. Developmental Evaluation “walked along side”

the project and individual community sites to measure change and track the journey in order to inform recommendations at local and provincial levels with multiple audiences.

TRADITIONAL VERSUS DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION



“Evaluation focuses on whether change has occurred, the nature and degree of change, and the factors that lead to change. Assessing, understanding, and explaining change is at the center

of evaluation. One of Developmental Evaluation’s niches is to support exploration and innovation before there is a program model to improve and summatively test.”

Michael Patton,
Developmental Evaluation (2011)

MULTIPLE DATA COLLECTION METHODS:



Every meeting had an end result from getting information from parents, or having service providers hear what we had to say; or carrying on to create solutions. Then we all carried that out into the community, [at events] such as the clothing sale, where you meet and talk to people and connect with people who also identified the need.

CCAT participant

Findings

Promising Practice - What Worked?

How did the project contribute to community services and service providers? Improved access, effectiveness, learning and sustainability.

BUILDING CAPACITY:

- Created and utilized a Literature Review of models of continuums which informed planning and actions
- Hosted “Think Tank” sessions for provincial and community representatives to work and learn together
- Provided site-based, community need specific training
- Activities focused on Collaboration and Evaluation
- Supported evaluative thinking and participation in evaluation

ENGAGING PARENT VOICE:

- Gathered parent voice in multiple ways such as surveys, focus groups and photo voice projects
- Engaged parents in designing and informing services and supports that work best for them
- Used effective models for increasing understanding from service provider and parent perspectives through Appreciative Inquiry

BUILDING COMMUNITY AWARENESS:

- Designed and used a communication continuum to support planning and sharing of information
- Disseminated materials to service providers and parents specific to events and services as well as child development
- Presented information on the various components to the project, impact and recommendations

WORKING COLLECTIVELY:

- Hosted or participated in community events to increase engagement
- Communicated with and connected service providers to work together, ensure community resources are well understood, and to improve services and transitions between settings
- Intentionally connected and supported activities through partnerships with other ECD projects toward a common goal
- Shared information and resources across sites & communities
- Connected with municipal governments regarding community environments, programs and supports relevant to children and young families
- Linked with rural and remote communities to increase awareness and understanding of the early years
- Used the early development instrument (EDI) data and partnered to generate community energy around improving child development prior to school entry
- Used technology and social media for increasing connections and sharing resources

Progress towards goals:

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS:

72% Increased ability to help families' access resources they need

72% Increased ability to make successful referrals

COMMUNITIES PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION:

73% Increased collaboration in providing supports and services

55% Services are more supportive of a continuum of services

93% Improved networking and information sharing among early learning

PARENTS INFORM DECISIONS:

80% Increased understanding of what parents want in services

65% Increased parent input into program planning and delivery

525 Number of parents engaged (Through surveys, focus groups, photo voice)

CAPACITY TO CREATE CHANGE:

At each site and at the provincial level, evaluation measured an increase in capacity in key domains:

- Participation and engagement
- Leadership capacity
- Sense of community - organizational structures and networks
- Ability to obtain resources for communication
- Collaboration among stakeholders



Findings (continued)

Major Lessons Learned

Parents' preferred sources of information when looking for programs, services and supports:

11% other parents

24% online/website

10% social media

12% community newsletter

12% school

1. Communities learned how to engage parents and service providers to create continua of services and supports and transform environments.
2. Community and provincial teams built capacities to learn, create and sustain change.
3. There were **6 keys to success** in ECD community capacity building and action:
 - **A strong project management team:** mentors who were well connected and able to navigate complexities;
 - **Community Coordinators:** resourceful and respected communicators in touch with their communities;
 - **Evaluation support:** reflective and evaluative thinking with support to clarify situations, inform decisions and build capacity;
 - **Community controlled resources:** empowered communities able to respond to local needs and dynamics;
 - **Strategic assessment/ planning and action:** enabling people with information and support for understanding and decision making;
 - **Adequate time:** to allow community development, build relationships, clarify roles, engage stakeholders, create collaboration, understand complexities, take action and create change



Recommendations

1. Build on the early childhood networks and champions that exist in communities throughout our province. Navigators and connectors are essential.
2. Build from the grass roots ability to self evaluate, take action and advocate for early childhood in community.
3. Connect projects focused on child development in the early years, so we can share with each other and continue to support local community work.
4. Make sure ECD is on every agenda and find ways to overcome barriers and create opportunities.
5. Invest in our understanding of how children are developing in our province (such as EDI) and our understanding of relevant research so we can learn from what works.

We are no longer drowning in the dark in our own silos.

Service provider



Call to Action

Listen to community voice

We feel fortunate to live in a community with such friendly people and I am happy that my kids can learn the benefits of being part of a community.

Parent

FAMILIES ARE EACH UNIQUE

and have different and emerging needs over time. The goal is to have a strong system of coordinated supports and services in community that create a comprehensive continuum from prenatal through school entry.

Strong continuums of support in the early years are essential in order to provide a strong foundation for life-long learning, and to ensure we thrive and prosper as a society now and in the future. We have an opportunity to utilize the learning from this project to achieve the vision of improved well-being for all young children in Alberta.

WHEN ASKED TO IMAGINE THE DESIRED FUTURE, PARENTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS ENVISIONED:

- A local and provincial framework for ECD that emphasizes development of a continual spectrum of services and supports;
- Inclusive community hubs, with staff trained in cultural competency, and skillful in welcoming families that move into an area, including newcomers to Canada;
- Focused social media and public awareness campaigns and dissemination of ECD information; and
- Use of learnings from evaluations and research to improve early child development policies and practices.

EYCP PARENTS DESCRIBE THE FUTURE AS 'WE ENVISION ...' WITHIN 3 THEMES

... receiving support through a community service for the care and development of our child a strong sense of belonging and mutual support as a parent a family friendly agency ...
Friendly, knowledgeable, helpful staff	Helpful people, knowing you're not alone; having fun in a safe place	Parent input into program planning and delivery
Personal services & connection to the other parents to enable sharing and support	A sense of community, friends and shared experience	Good referral relationships & agencies that are involved in the communities they serve
Flexible appointment dates, times & facilities located close to home.	Being part of programs where you can talk, learn & socialize with your children	Better reach to diverse age groups, childcare and more free events

Call to Action

What you can do

THROUGHOUT THIS PROJECT, we have had the opportunity to build stronger links and provide recommendations from our learning for a stronger early system of support for families with young children. We encourage others to listen to the wisdom of communities and families who participated.

There are multiple efforts taking place in Alberta to better support families with young children. We encourage people leading such work to think about how each component can link in order to leverage resources and learning from others to create strong

continuums of support for children and families prenatal through school entry, and so all children have a healthy start.

SOME TANGIBLE IDEAS FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS ARE:

- Ask parents about their needs and their experiences in accessing supportive environments for their families;
- Reflect on how well your services and the transition points are currently connected to support access for families in your community;

- Identify areas for improved coordination or collaboration with others to make supports more easily accessible and better suited to family needs; and
- Find out more about the strategies used within the Early Years Continuum Project and outcomes of the project and recommendations for action. Visit successby6edmonton.info

Declare yourself an “Early Years Champion” and inspire others to do the same.

*A Healthy Start –
Let’s Make it Happen*





EARLY YEARS CONTINUUM PROJECT

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