

Steps

ECMap Newsletter

Early Child Development Mapping Project

Fall – September 2011

First Community Information Packages released

The first early childhood development (ECD) information packages are being released to communities in Alberta.

How does it feel to be among the first?

“We were really pumped,” says Lorry Vanden Dungen, chair of the Municipal District of Taber – Warner County South Early Childhood Development Coalition. “It was very quiet as everyone took their first look at the packages. Then the room exploded with questions.”

Vanden Dungen’s coalition received its first information package on July 25. The package contains Early Development Instrument (EDI) results on the development of kindergarten children in the community. It also contains socio-economic information and a preliminary map of community resources. The coalition has three months to study the package, share the information with the community and start developing an action plan. The packages are then released publicly on ECMap’s website.

When do communities get their packages? Firstly, they have to map their boundaries, so that information for their local area can be grouped and analyzed. Secondly, EDI results have to be analyzed for kindergarten children who live in the community. EDI questionnaires are collected by school authorities. The results are then grouped according to the postal codes where children live, since children do not necessarily attend the school closest to their home. Information on socio-economic status and community resources also has to be collected and mapped.

Four communities participated in the pilot launch of Community Information Packages in late spring: Edmonton West, Fort McMurray, Strathcona County – Rural and Sherwood Park.

As of September 1, 61 so-called ‘early childhood development’ communities have been identified in Alberta. Of these, 35 have applied for and received seed grants through their coalitions to respond to ECD results and plan local initiatives.



Ed Kaiser

Children play in the common area at the Hromada Housing Co-op in Edmonton.

we engage

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New website launch

ECMap will launch its new website on October 25. Check the website out for community ECD results, information on early development and community development tools. The address will remain the same: www.ecmap.ca

Early childhood development

Chief Medical Officer of Health report focuses on the early years



Dr. Jim Talbot, senior provincial medical officer of health

Children who get a good start in life tend to be healthier, better employed and more productive as adults, says Dr. Jim Talbot, Alberta's senior provincial medical officer of health. In this interview, Dr. Talbot explains why every Albertan should care about early childhood development — the focus of the Chief Medical Officer of Health's 2011 report, Let's Talk about the Early Years.

As the report points out, the period between birth and age five has been treated as a sort of black box. As a society, we haven't paid much attention to this time period. The new science, however, clearly shows the importance of the first five years to long-term health and well-being. Each stage in a child's development builds on the previous stage.

The early years present opportunities that may not come again. When you consider strategies to reduce health care costs — as well as crime, remedial education and other costs — you have to look upstream at prevention.

Prevention involves more than just telling people to make sure their kids are eating right

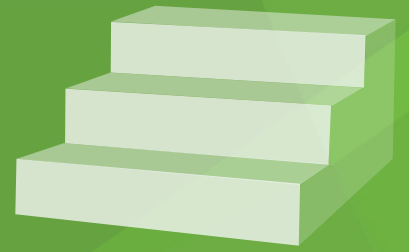
and getting enough exercise. Families have to have access to healthy food and safe parks in their neighbourhoods. Children need fresh air, clean water and nurturing, safe environments. All of these help their brains to develop properly. Research shows that [negative early] patterns get passed from generation to generation. So we're not just struggling with the health and well-being of this generation.

With this report, our aim is to create a dialogue with Albertans about the importance of the early years and why our investment during this time is so important. We want to extend the discussion beyond parents and grandparents. I'm a businessperson, for example. How can I make my business more child- and family-friendly for my employees and my customers? I'm a librarian. What programs can I provide to lessen the isolation experienced by many young families? Government has a role to play. So does community spirit. So do we all. Ideally we want to create healthier minds and bodies, better connections and better resources for our families with young children.

We'd like to create conversations among Albertans about what they can do individually and collectively [to support early childhood development.] This is really the most important investment that we can make in the health of individual Albertans and the economic health of our province.

To read the report, please go to <http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/CMOH-Lets-Talk-Early-Years-2011.pdf>

Community coalitions



Pincher Creek builds a playground and its community spirit



The Pincher Creek playground committee celebrates the success of their project.

The goal was ambitious: Raise \$150,000 in four months and rally 200 volunteers to build a playground.

Pincher Creek – a town of 3,700 – not only managed to do just that, but a year later it raised an additional \$95,000 for phase two, adding wheelchair accessibility and a special needs area.

“The response was overwhelming,” says Jacqui Bruns, a woman with a big infectious laugh and a driving force on the playground committee. “You wouldn’t believe all the people who jumped on board.”

Pincher Creek’s state-of-the-art playground and fitness park show what can be accomplished when a community is inspired and mobilized to support its families and children.

Early in 2010, the town had no outdoor play facilities for young children or outdoor gathering places for families,

says Bruns, a parent educator and family support worker for the Pincher Creek Parent Link Centre. “All the playgrounds were designed for older children. There was nothing for younger kids. No baby swings. There was no place for parents and kids to go and hang out.”

Community members contacted Let Them Be Kids (LTBK), an Ontario-based, non-profit organization that helps to build community capacity through the building of playgrounds and covers up to half of playground equipment costs. Pincher Creek’s grant application was approved and the playground committee got down to work.

Children in the community chose the kind of playground they wanted first through a process called *dotmocracy*. They stuck dots on pictures of the designs and equipment they liked best. Then everyone went to work to raise money. By March, about \$7,000 was collected.

“We knew we had a long way to go before Build Day on June 26,” says Bruns. Her committee took LTBK’s mantra to heart: ‘You are not just building a playground; you are building a community.’

“We went out and talked and talked and talked — to everyone. We went to oil companies and dentists’ offices. We went to all the local businesses, service clubs and church groups.”

Shell cut a cheque for \$25,000. Elderly church parishioners contributed \$10, \$15. Family movie nights, fish fries and a Mexican fiesta were organized. In-kind donations poured in. Local Second World War hero Hank Planger — a veteran of ‘The Devil’s Brigade,’ an American-Canadian elite commando unit — agreed to have the playground named after him.

Scores of volunteers worked up to 10 hours a day for four days before the official launch. On Build Day itself, 300 showed up, 100 more than needed, for the final assembling. Planger cut the ribbon at 4 p.m. and hundreds of excited kids ran on to their new play space.

The work wasn’t over yet. There was still phase two to go. Bruns’ committee realized they had forgotten something important when they were contacted by an occupational therapist whose young disabled client was not able to access the playground. The problem was fixed in phase two, completed in June. The playground now has wheelchair-accessible recycled-tire surfaces and a special sensory play area.

The hugely successful project has inspired other community-building initiatives, says Bruns. “It just shows what extraordinary things ordinary people in communities can accomplish when they work together.”

A video of the project can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JJt78alc8>

A right to play

Children’s right to play is recognized in Article 31 of the United Nations’ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, ratified by Canada in 1991.

Profiles

Going the distance



Laurel McCalla, community development coordinator for Zone 6

Laurel McCalla reckons that she's logged "at least" 20,000 kilometres in her little red Mazda hatchback making the rounds of Zone 8 over the past year.

She's been a regular visitor to Lac La Biche, Athabasca, Cold Lake, Bonnyville, St. Paul, Glendon, Smoky Lake, Two Hills and other communities in the east-central region.

She has helped to get early childhood development (ECD) coalitions off the ground in Lac La Biche and Athabasca and has seen support for early development grow in other communities.

"People get so excited when they see the potential of this work," she says. "I've heard comments like 'Wow, this could change the way we plan and design our communities!' The possibilities are endless."

McCalla has developed a special appreciation for the diversity and uniqueness of each community. She also now knows where to find the best restaurants, gas stations and restrooms along the stretches of Highway 28, 55, 36 and 2 that crisscross the area. She's never received a speeding ticket during her

long hours on the road, spent with the radio dial tuned to CBC. "Jian [Ghomeshi, host of the national talk show Q] and I have become quite close."

This fall, McCalla will be covering shorter distances as she takes over as community development coordinator for Zone 6. The area encompasses Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park and Strathcona County, Lamont, Morinville and St. Albert, as well as Edmonton, her hometown. McCalla has a track record as a volunteer in the city, including with the Greater Edmonton Alliance and the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. She also served abroad as a participant in Canada World Youth's leadership program and spent eight months solo backpacking through Asia before completing her degree in social work at the University of Calgary.

McCalla looks forward to working with Zone 6 communities as they receive their first Community Information Packages. "It will be exciting to see how they step forward with this information," she says.

Laurel McCalla can be reached at 780-982-1394 or lmccalla@ualberta.ca

EDI update

The national norm for Canadian children has been revised by the Offord Centre for Child Studies (McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario). According to the updated norm, 25.40 per cent of kindergarten children are experiencing great difficulty in at least one area of development. In our June newsletter front page story, we reported the previous norm, which was 27 per cent and has since been changed. The Offord Centre developed the Early Development Instrument (EDI), which assesses the development of kindergarten-aged children. For more information, please go to www.offordcentre.com

Contact us

The Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap) is part of the Early Child Development Mapping Initiative, which is funded by Alberta Education. ECMap is led by the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP), Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta.

For further information, please go to www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca and click on our logo

You may also contact us at ecmap@extn.ualberta.ca or 780-248-1574 or

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Mapping a bright future for Alberta's young children