

Steps

ECMap Newsletter

Early Child Development Mapping Project

Spring – March 2012

New website launched

Our new website is up!

It has a whole new look and is packed with information.

What would you like to know?

- Check out the first early childhood development results for Alberta.
- Find the latest community results. These are posted online as the information becomes available.
- Click on Community Stories and find out how communities across the province are working to support positive early development through their coalitions. Coalition contacts are also listed.
- Learn more about the early years and their importance. The latest scientific research is explained in easy-to-understand terms and illustrated with simple charts and graphics. Links are provided to some of the best resources available online, from video shorts to handouts that can be printed out.
- Rummage around in our community development tool kit. Find out how to apply

for seed grants, mobilize coalitions and share your community results. More tools will be developed and posted over the next couple of months.

- Download and print ECMap materials, including fact sheets, brochures and newsletters.
- Look up research papers developed by the ECMap Project Team.

The initial response to our new site has leaned towards the positive: "Awesome information." "Very user friendly." "Love it!"

Here's what Michelle Anderson-Draper, community coordinator for the North East Early Childhood Development Coalition in Edmonton, has to say about it: "It's extremely helpful as a one-stop shop. I can look up community and provincial results, download resources and access the latest information on early development. I also like to see what other coalitions are doing and how they are responding to results. I refer people to it all the time, from service providers to community members."

we engage

In this issue

<i>Website launched</i>	1
<i>Urban design linked to children's health</i>	2
<i>What every child needs</i>	3
<i>Profile: Holly Handfield - Northern Alberta runs in her blood</i>	4
<i>Links</i>	4
<i>Contact us</i>	4

That's Phase One. Phase two will feature an interactive mapping component. Users will be able to find early development results and demographic information for communities and Alberta, and print out maps with their search results. Phase two will go live in late summer or early fall.

You'll find us at the same address: www.ecmap.ca. Drop by for a test drive. Let us know what you think. Come often and check out what's new.



(left to right) Laurel McCalla, ECMap community development coordinator, and Michelle Anderson-Draper, Edmonton Northeast coalition coordinator

Steps goes electronic

If you would like to receive the electronic version of our newsletter, you can subscribe by going to <http://www.industrymailout.com/Industry/Subscribe.aspx?m=26139>

Steps will continue to appear in PDF format as well.

Early childhood development

Urban design linked to children's health

Urban planners need to do a better job in designing healthy environments for young children and families, says Dr. Nazeem Muhajarine, lead researcher for the *Smart Cities, Healthy Kids* study.

The three-year, Saskatchewan-based study is exploring the link between urban planning and design and children's health and activity levels.

"There's no question that we have to rethink how we build our neighbourhoods," says Dr. Muhajarine, a social epidemiologist at the University of Saskatchewan. "We've created a car-based culture in North America over the past 50 years. Cities have not been designed to promote health and social well-being, particularly that of children. This approach is not sustainable because it puts too much pressure on our resources and creates enormous health problems in our communities."

Smart Cities, Healthy Kids was initiated in response to concerns over ballooning obesity rates and related chronic diseases among children. Twenty per cent of Canadian children are overweight or obese by the ages of two to five, according to 2004 Statistics Canada data.

The study is looking at how neighbourhoods in a mid-sized prairie city — Saskatoon — are affecting children's physical activity and diet. It's the first Canadian study to take a child-oriented, citywide and developmental approach to examining urban environments and their impact on health, says Dr. Muhajarine. Most previous studies have focused on adults and on a few neighbourhoods.

Dr. Muhajarine's research team walked through all 60 of Saskatoon's residential neighbourhoods, surveying buildings, roads, sidewalks, parks and green spaces. They measured the number and variety of walkable destinations, amenities, traffic safety and crime rates. They also surveyed the physical activity of more than 1,600 children and interviewed 24 families on how they felt their neighbourhoods influenced their activity levels. In phase two of the study, researchers are visiting restaurants, grocery stores and convenient stores in neighbourhoods

to see whether they offer nutritious, healthy food options. Dietary intake will also be measured in more than 2,000 children, and families and children interviewed to understand how food purchasing and consumption choices are made.

What the team has discovered so far is that older, denser neighbourhoods do tend to encourage more social interaction and physical activity. But safety is a big

concern for parents with young children in mixed-use, high-density neighbourhoods where there is a lot of traffic — cars and strangers walking by. The team also found that children who live in newer suburban areas are not playing outdoors as much as expected. The curvilinear — crescent-shaped — roads favoured by urban planners because they reduce drive-by traffic were supposed to make neighbourhoods safe and friendly for children to play in. "But we didn't actually see this and we're still trying to figure out exactly why," says Dr. Muhajarine.

The food environment related study, still ongoing, found that some inner-city neighbourhoods are virtual "food deserts," with no food outlets other than convenience stores and fast-food restaurants. About 30,000 people have no nearby access to a full-service grocery store. Communities in Saskatoon are already responding, however, and a co-op grocery store is slated to open in the fall in the inner-city.

Dr. Muhajarine says that further study needs to be done into how urban design can best incorporate the needs of young children and families. "What we do know is that we need



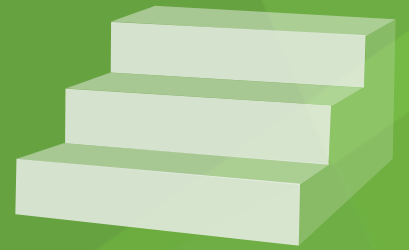
Dr. Nazeem Muhajarine heads the *Smart Cities, Healthy Kids* study and has been involved with Early Development Instrument (EDI) data collection in Saskatchewan for more than 10 years.



to build neighbourhoods with young children, two to three years of age, in mind. That's when they begin to step outside and explore their environment. We need to create neighbourhoods that promote physical activity and social interaction and are safe for young children, and that make parents feel comfortable and safe."

For more information about the study, please go to www.kidskan.ca

Community coalitions



What every child needs: Kids respond through their art

“Every kid needs a picnic in the park,” says Kennedy Bloomfield, 8, who created a whimsical piece of art to illustrate her point of view.

The Grade 3 student was one of 40 elementary school children who participated in an art project launched by the Medicine Hat Early Childhood Coalition. The children were asked to create artwork in response to the following two questions: “What is community?” “What does a child need to feel loved?”

Josh Gibson, 6, and a Grade 1 student, drew a big red “Fancy” Hotel. The caption to his picture reads: “Every kid needs a hotel if they don’t have enough money for a home.”

A colourful Plasticine sculpture created by Gabrielle Vaz, 9, and a Grade 4 student, shows two children happily splashing in the water together. Their hamburgers and drinks are piled on a blanket on the shore. “Every child needs to have food and something to drink. Every kid needs a friend,” says the caption.

“We were blown away by the children’s creativity and insight,” says Jennifer Usher, who chairs the Medicine Hat coalition.

The coalition wanted to better understand what kind of environments best support children and families. It decided to engage children in the process, following a suggestion from *Raising the Village* (by Tracy Smyth and Tammy Dewar), a guidebook that helps communities to mobilize around early childhood development. The authors suggest that children be involved as active, rather than just passive, participants in community development.

“We wanted to get children’s perspective of what’s important to them and what community means to them,” says Usher. “We wanted to expand the feeling of community to include them.”

Two local after school programs agreed to participate: the Connaught School After School Program and the CAPE (the Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence) Out of School Care Program.

What did the children have to say?

“Play is right up there, along with food, family and a home,” says Usher. “Kids regard play as one of the basics.”

Early childhood development experts would agree with them there.

To find out more about the *Medicine Hat Early Childhood Coalition*, please go to our website at <https://www.ecmap.ca/Community-Development/Community-Stories/Community-Stories-for-Southern-Alberta/Pages/Medicine-Hat.aspx>



Gabrielle Vaz, 9, Grade 4



Created by Kennedy Bloomfield, 8, Grade 3



Josh Gibson, 6, Grade 1



Emma-Lee Gutfriend, 8, Grade 4

Profiles

Northern Alberta runs in her blood



Community development coordinator Holly Handfield covers more than 112,000 square kilometers in northwestern Alberta Zone 9.

Holly Handfield is proud to call herself a “northern girl.”

“I was raised here and nearly born here,” she says with a laugh. Handfield was a year old when her parents moved from Edmonton to a cattle and grain farm near Grimshaw. She has made her home in northern Alberta ever since.

“It’s a beautiful place to live and raise your children,” says Handfield, who lives in Sexsmith, 20 kilometers north of Grande Prairie, with her husband and two teenagers, aged 14 and 16.

As community development coordinator for Zone 9, Handfield is responsible for a huge swath of territory — about 112,261 square kilometers — in northwestern Alberta. After living, volunteering and working — as a kindergarten teacher, family literacy coordinator, regional college instructor, and child care agency supervisor and consultant — in the area for most of her life, Handfield figures that she knows someone in just about every town, village and hamlet.

The personal connections have helped to bridge the long distances she has had to travel, mobilizing early childhood development (ECD) coalitions. Handfield — and the communities in northwestern Alberta — have risen to the challenge, however. Nine coalitions have already been organized and a tenth is taking its first

steps off the ground. Three coalitions will receive their first early development community results in March, and another four are scheduled to do so before summer.

This is the first time that many of the communities are organizing around early childhood development, Handfield says. Although they’re all anticipating the release of their first local data, some are already looking beyond the numbers. Coalitions in rural areas struggling for survival are taking a long-term view and looking at community sustainability. “They are beginning to ask themselves what they can do to make their communities more attractive and engaging for young families,” says Handfield.

Other coalitions are dealing with the opposite problem as they grapple with resource-fuelled population booms. Zone 9 also covers Grande Prairie and the Peace Country region, which experienced some of the fastest growth, close to 17 per cent, between 2006 and 2011 in the province.

“I love that this project allows communities to build their capacity around the early years on their own terms and in their own way,” says Handfield.

Holly Handfield can be reached at hhandfield@ualberta.ca or 780-518-7361.

Links

The **North East Early Childhood Development Coalition** in Edmonton has launched its own website. The site features a blog by coalition community coordinator Michelle Anderson-Draper. You can find them at <http://www.needmontonecdcoalition.com/default.html>

This **brief video** (8 min.) provides a wonderful overview of the EDI. *Early Development Instrument: Benefits to Children, Families and Communities* was produced by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at the University of British Columbia. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMrxdzKYIYw&feature=related>

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.ecmap.ca

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

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If you are not on our subscription list and would like to receive the newsletter, please contact Olenka Melnyk, communications coordinator at olenka.melnyk@ualberta.ca or 780-492-4057. We welcome your story ideas, resources, links, province wide event listings and feedback.

Mapping a bright future for Alberta’s young children