

Steps

ECMap Newsletter

Early Child Development Mapping Project

Summer 2014

Community results show wide disparities in early development across Alberta

How are Alberta's young children doing?

The answer to that question can vary a great deal depending on where children live in this province.

Newly released baseline data shows wide disparities in young children's development across Alberta. Early Development Instrument (EDI) results for one Edmonton community, for example, show 58 per cent of young children developing appropriately in five areas of development. In an adjacent community, the rate drops to 32 per cent.

In Alberta, 46 per cent of kindergarten-aged children are developing appropriately in all five areas of development measured by the EDI. The range varies from a high of 73 per cent in one central eastern Alberta community to a low of 16 per cent in another one nearby.

The results were contained in the *Community profiles of early childhood development in Alberta* report, prepared by ECMap and shared with community coalitions at a provincial gathering on April 28 and 29th at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

"No matter which way we slice the data, there are inequities in early childhood development in the province," Dr. Susan Lynch, director of ECMap, told coalitions.

ECMap was contracted by Alberta Education to analyze EDI data on more than 70,200 kindergarten-aged children collected over a five-year period (2009 to 2013).

EDI results were compiled in the *Community profiles* report, along with information on community socio-economic status and resources. Analysis done so far shows a strong correlation between socio-economic status and early development results.

Not surprisingly, children who live in areas with a higher socio-economic status tend to do better than children who live in areas with a lower SES.

"But that's not always the case," said Lynch. "We can learn a great deal from the anomalies."

Further research is needed to determine whether there's a link between community resources and early development, and whether resources compensate for socio-economic disadvantages, she added.

The release of the report was a highlight of the provincial gathering, organized by ECMap and attended by 153 participants representing 89 community coalitions (out of 102).

Continued on Page 4

In this issue

<i>Don't blame parents, change policies: social policy expert says</i>	2
<i>Calculating the impact of coalitions and EDI data</i>	3
<i>Profile: A Champion for Children in St. Paul</i>	4
<i>Contact us</i>	4



ECMap coordinator Launa Clark and Calgary North of McKnight coalition coordinator Tyler Belgrave prepare to hand out community profile reports at the spring gathering.

Early childhood development

Don't blame parents, change policies: social policy expert says

Early development results won't improve without changes to family policy, says Dr. Paul Kershaw, a leading Canadian social policy expert.

Kershaw became convinced of this after watching early vulnerability rates climb in his home province B.C. from 26 per cent in 2004, when B.C. first started collecting Early Development Instrument (EDI) data, to the current 33 per cent.

Kershaw, who is an associate director of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) and a policy professor at the University of B.C., also concluded that conversations about how young children are doing need to be reframed into conversations about how the *generation* raising young children is doing. Talking about early development results, especially when children are struggling, often ends with blaming parents.

"In Canada, parents are still largely held responsible for how children are doing, regardless of the social context," says Kershaw. "The response from the public and media tends to be 'If children are struggling, then it's the parents' fault. They must be making irresponsible decisions.' It's difficult to get people to think about what's happening in society."

But that's where the conversation needs to go if real change is to occur, he said during his April 28th keynote address during the coalition spring gathering. Canadians need to better understand the societal pressures that young families are experiencing today and adapt public policy accordingly.

Families are worse off than a generation ago, he says. Parents work harder and earn less, have less time for their children and pay substantially more for basics such as housing and child care than their parents did.

Canada's economy has doubled since the 1970s, but family incomes have stagnated. Most mothers work outside the home today, but the shift from single to dual earner families



Photo: Fahim Hassan

Dr. Paul Kershaw proposes a new deal for the stressed out generation raising young families.

has increased household income by only 12 per cent. Meanwhile, housing costs have soared by 76 per cent and child care costs take a mortgage-sized bite out of family earnings.

In Alberta, the median full-time income of 25 to 34 year old workers has dropped slightly when adjusted for inflation from \$24.70 an hour in 1976 to \$24.00 an hour, says Kershaw.

He coined the term Generation Squeeze to describe the struggles of the child-rearing generation. He also adopted it as the name for his nationwide campaign to secure a "better deal" for young families.

The cost? Kershaw advocates more equitable government spending on the under 45 age group. Currently, federal and provincial governments together spend \$12,000 per person under age 45 every year as compared to \$45,000 for those 65 and over. He would like to see spending increase by \$1,000 a year for the under 45 age group that is raising children to cover the cost of his proposed new deal.

Canada has a stingy record when it comes to investing in young families, he says. UNICEF ranks Canada around the bottom of industrialized nations.

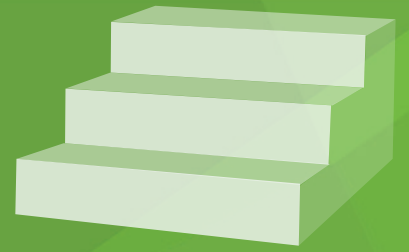
"If you are leaving the generation raising kids squeezed for time, money and services, that will have consequences for developmental outcomes," says Kershaw. "Despite being the most affluent province in Canada, Alberta is already finding that out. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to realize, 'Maybe we need to do something about that here and across the country.' "

The New Deal

1. **Parental leave:** up to 18 months after birth, increased benefits, healthy child monitoring and parenting support
2. **Child care:** max \$10/day full time; free for families earning less than \$40,000/year
3. **Work:** flex-time, shorter work week options, improved benefits, income supplements for low-earning families

Find out more about Generation Squeeze at <http://gensqueeze.ca/>.

Community coalitions



Calculating the impact of coalitions and EDI data

When you add up the impact of coalitions and EDI (Early Development Instrument) data, you get an equation that goes something like this:

102 coalitions + 5 years of EDI data = scores of community initiatives.

The initiatives range from new playgrounds to parenting conferences and workshops, playgroups, community resource guides, family friendly business campaigns, early development messages printed on pay stubs and bus benches and National Child Day proclamations.

Coalitions shared their “collective impact” stories during the April provincial gathering and during one-on-one conversations with EMap. A number of common themes emerged, including:

- the use of Early Development Instrument (EDI) results in planning and programming by municipalities, school boards, libraries and service organizations,
- a closer collaboration among service providers and organizations,
- a better understanding of the importance of the early years among parents and the general public, and
- increased awareness of community resources that are available to young children and families.

One-hundred-and-two coalitions were established across Alberta as part of EMap’s community engagement process. Their role has been to interpret and share research information about early development in their communities and use the data to improve supports for young children and families. Coalitions were able to apply for seed grants (a total of \$5 million was earmarked by the Alberta Government) to assist them in their work.

Here are a few quick snapshot examples of the many things happening at the local level.



Photo: Fahim Hassan

“Reporter” Donna Cushman (right) gets the latest scoop about West Red Deer Country from EMap coordinator Laurie Lafortune during a Hot News Flash skit at the spring gathering.

Places to play: The town of Kingman used local EDI results on physical health to successfully apply for \$50,000 in federal funding to rebuild a derelict playground. Lac La Biche is also using its EDI results (41 per cent of its young children are struggling in their physical development) to raise funds to rebuild a well-used but aging playground. The Medicine Hat coalition organized roving gyms throughout the community to provide indoor play space for young children during the long winter months.

New facilities and programs: The County of Strathcona invested \$350,000 in an enriched play-based program in Adrossan. The fast growing hamlet is bursting with young families, but has few preschool programs. The Innisfail coalition received United Way funding and convinced town council to provide space and staffing to establish a family centre.

Planning and public policy: Coalitions led 87 community conversations in response to a government request for public input on the creation of a provincial strategy for early

childhood development and child poverty reduction. In Edmonton, EDI results are used to inform city planning and programming, including summer recreation programs, and coalitions serve as a link between communities and city services.

Family friendly businesses: Coalitions in Hanna and Rimbey launched campaigns to persuade local businesses to serve families better by providing, for example, change tables in washrooms, access for strollers and a welcoming environment.

Community outreach: The Calgary North of McKnight coalition translated its EDI results, as well as tips on early development, into Punjabi, Hindi, Farsi, French, English, Arabic and Urdu to serve the needs of a large immigrant population. The Vegreville coalition has set up a family mentoring program that pairs active, well-connected families with those that are less engaged or newcomers to help overcome their isolation and encourage them to get involved with the community.

Profiles

A Champion for Children in St. Paul

At 18, Lynoya Henderson was thrust into a parenting role when a favourite aunt died of cancer, leaving behind a one-year-old daughter.

Henderson, who had just finished high school, put her post-secondary plans on hold and looked after her young cousin for the next two years. She shared the child-rearing responsibilities with her mother, who runs a safety training business in St. Paul, and with the little girl's dad, whose job in the oil patch took him away from home a great deal of the time.

"As soon as she was old enough, I went to college," says Henderson, who completed a two-year diploma in early learning and child care at Lakeland College.

The years spent looking after her cousin, as well as younger siblings and other children in her large, extended family, set Henderson on her career path. She realized that she loved working with young children and that she was good at it.

"I certainly had enough practice," she says. "As the oldest child and grandchild, I was always the caregiver in my family."

Henderson, now 23, is the coordinator of the St. Paul and Area Cradle to Crayons coalition and a part-time teaching assistant at Ashmont Elementary School. A Cold Lake First Nation Cree, she feels fortunate in having grown up in a culture that values family and considers

child-rearing a shared responsibility. "If one person in the family is having a baby, then everyone else is having the baby, too, and wants to be involved," she says with a laugh.

Strong family ties are important, she says. But so are community supports and services, and having good information about early development.

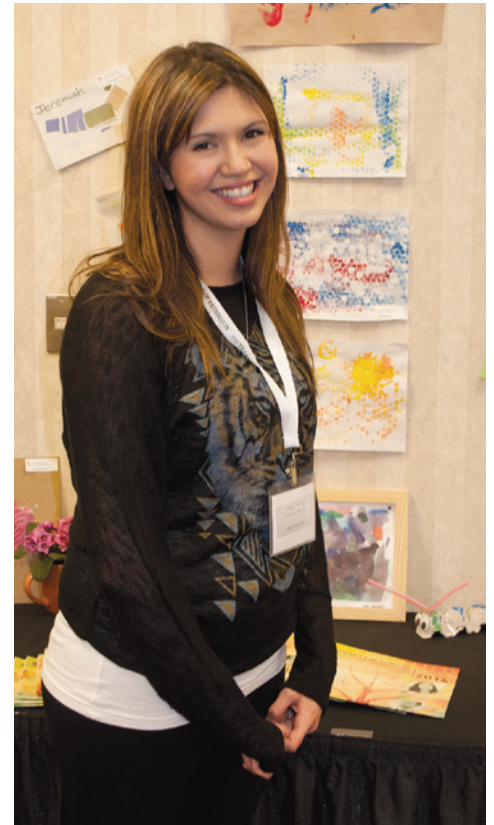
"I wish I knew what I do now when I was taking care of my niece," she says.

As coalition coordinator, she would like to see a greater awareness and use of the many "fantastic" resources in St. Paul. A recent convert to Twitter, she regards social media as a powerful ally in sharing information and connecting with parents. "It's where all our young moms are, especially Facebook. It's fun and builds a sharing community."

She appreciates the knowledge and experience that she is gaining as invaluable pre-parenting training. "I get to do all this and learn before I start having kids myself."

As for her niece, she's in kindergarten now. She has a new stepbrother and stepmom, and her dad is working at a job in town. "She's doing great," says Henderson, ewho remains close to the little girl.

To access the coalition Facebook page, go to St. Paul and Area's Cradle to Crayon Initiative.



St. Paul and Area coalition coordinator Lynoya Henderson can be reached at lynoya-henderson@yahoo.ca.

Continued from Page 1

Participants had opportunities to network, and discuss leadership, funding, sustainability and the impact of their work in communities.

They were commended for their passionate commitment to early development by David Woloshyn, executive director of the Education Supports Sector, who spoke on behalf of Alberta Education.

The *Community profiles* report can be accessed at <https://www.ecmap.ca/Findings-Maps/Community-Results/complete2014/Pages/default.aspx>

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@ualberta.ca 780-248-1574

ECMap
Community-University Partnership
Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta
L-146 Enterprise Square
10230 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4P6

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, provincewide event listings and feedback.

Mapping a bright future for Alberta's young children