

Steps

ECMap Newsletter

Early Child Development Mapping Project

Early Winter 2010

A giant step forward

In the classic children's game "Captain, May I?" participants take various steps — baby, medium, banana and giant steps — to reach their goal. If these measurements were to be applied to ECMap and its work, then the Project took a giant step forward in the past year, its first.

The Early Child Development (ECD) Mapping Initiative, which is funded by Alberta Education, was officially launched in April by Education Minister Dave Hancock. The Project, which is part of the Initiative, began its activities months earlier, however. A project team of data, mapping, early childhood and community development experts was assembled. The groundwork was then laid for analyzing and mapping early childhood development (ECD) information and assisting communities to respond to results. ECMap is led by the Community-University Partnership and is based at the University of Alberta.

The second wave, or round, of Early Development Instrument (EDI) data has been collected with more than 17,000 children and 42 school authorities participating. That's a big step up from the first wave in 2009,

which involved 9,600 children and seven school authorities. The EDI is a population-based measure of the development of kindergarten children and is widely used across Canada.

EDI results will be mapped according to where children live — their communities. Results will be shared with communities, starting in 2011, along with information on socio-economic factors and community resources that may affect childhood development.

Community development coordinators, based in 11 zones, have been helping to organize ECD coalitions across Alberta. Coalitions may apply for seed grants, funded by Alberta Education, to plan local ECD initiatives. (See *information on page three.*) It is anticipated that up to 100 communities will develop coalitions over the next four years.

Many steps lie ahead as we discover more about how our young children are developing and how they can be best supported as they make their giant leaps into their — and Alberta's — future.



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"If we can invest our time and resources in ways that improve the quality of life for vulnerable children, and help all children achieve their full potential, we will certainly realize returns in economic prosperity and reduce the burdens associated with crime, social welfare, and health. But we also stand to create a society that is more tolerant and socially inclusive — in short, a better place for everyone to live."

J. Douglas Wilms, from Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (University of Alberta Press, 2002)

Early childhood development



Studying the EDI in First Nations communities

The Yellowhead Tribal College and University of Alberta researchers are looking at ways to use the Early Development Instrument (EDI) effectively with aboriginal communities.

The EDI has been successfully implemented across Canada as a population-based tool to measure the development of kindergarten children. First Nations communities have raised concerns, however, that the EDI does not include areas of early childhood development (ECD) that are important to them.



“EDI data is often incomplete as it reflects a western approach and misses important aspects of aboriginal development, such as culture, language and spirituality,” says



The study team: (second from l) Tracey Poitras-Collins, Yellowhead Tribal College, and (third from l) Dr. Rebecca Gokiert, Community-University Partnership, U of A

Dr. Rebecca Gokiert, assistant director of the Community-University Partnership at the U of A's Faculty of Extension.

Gokiert is co-leading a three-year, \$500,000 study that aims to address some of these shortcomings. Researchers will seek broad community input from the five member nations of the Yellowhead Tribal Council to develop EDI supplements that will meet their requirements.

Building community trust and support is critical to the success of the study and to using the EDI in aboriginal communities, says Tracey Poitras-Collins, who is a co-leader in the study and special projects coordinator at Yellowhead Tribal College, which is based in Edmonton.

“We’ll be looking at how the EDI can provide an understanding of our children that is most useful to our communities,” she says. “Our communities want to see their values and beliefs honoured, and to have a say in how information is interpreted and shared.”

The Yellowhead Tribal Council represents the Alexander First Nation, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Enoch Cree Nation, O’Chiese First Nation and Sunchild First Nation, which make up three distinct cultures.

The EDI supplements developed by the study will be piloted during the Early Child Development Mapping Initiative and will provide a useful model for ECD projects elsewhere in Canada.

Director’s message



How pleased I am to be providing a message in this very first newsletter from the Early Child Development Mapping (ECMap) Project! STEPS represents a milestone in the work of the Project as we build connections among communities, schools and governments. The ECMap project team will use STEPS to keep you informed about what is happening across the province as we learn about the development of our youngest citizens. We will update you regularly on the gathering and analysis of preschool child development information, and on the work of communities as they plan early childhood activities in their areas. Please give us feedback on the newsletter and the information and stories you would like to see included. Thanks to all of you who are working with us to support positive development of young children throughout Alberta. Let’s keep in touch!

Dr. Susan Lynch, ECMap director

Community coalitions



(l to r) Lori Prediger, chair of the Strathcona County Early Childhood Development Local Coordinating Committee and Marnie Lee, social development liaison, Strathcona County Family and Community Services and organizer of the ABCD workshop

Building on strengths: Strathcona County coalition

What resources do we have in our community? How can these be used more effectively? How can we involve more parents and community members in early childhood development (ECD)?

These are some of the questions that members of the Strathcona County ECD coalition were asking themselves when they attended a November 22-23 workshop led by Mike Green, a well-known U.S. community development trainer and the author of *When People Care Enough to Act*.

Green's community-based approach to addressing social and economic issues has been successfully used by local governments and organizations across North America to deal with problems as diverse as inner-city renewal and job creation for disabled adults. His Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) training helps communities to identify their strengths and mobilize their resources to achieve goals and address problems through broad-based community involvement.

"The focus upon community assets is a natural fit for ECD mapping and for our coalition," says Lori Prediger, chair of the Strathcona County Early Childhood Development Local Coordinating Committee, as the coalition is called. "We've been growing towards this."

The coalition is preparing to map community resources and is anticipating the release of local Early Development Instrument (EDI) results and socio-economic information that will be available over the coming months. "This will help us to mobilize our resources in a more cohesive, coordinated fashion. It will also provide a solid rationale for local planning of everything from green spaces to public transportation."

The coalition has 27 members who represent 18 organizations and institutions, including both the separate and public school divisions. It is now looking to involve more parents.

Strathcona County is a rapidly growing municipality with a young population (average

Seed grants

Early child development (ECD) community coalitions are invited to apply for seed grants to plan healthy childhood development initiatives in their communities. The Early Child Development Community Response Seed Grants are one-time grants of up to \$50,000 and are funded by the Government of Alberta through Alberta Education.

The grants aim to help communities to respond to research information emerging from the Early Child Development Mapping Initiative and to develop community approaches to positive early development.

For more information, please go to www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca and click on the ECDMap logo.



age is 37). More than one in ten of its residents are under the age of ten.

"We know that children are a top priority in this community," says Prediger, who is also a coordinator for Strathcona County Family and Community Services. "In our last municipal social values survey children and youth were identified as extremely important by our residents."

Profiles



La Vonne Rideout, community development coordinator, zone 1

La Vonne was born and raised in Alberta's Big Sky Country, the fifth of six children on a Pincher Creek family mixed farm. Her childhood was as close to idyllic as is possible she says. Looking back, the only thing she regrets is selling her beloved Arabian mare Billy to buy her first car, a navy-blue Ford Comet. "I was 16," she explains.

For the past 25 years, La Vonne has worked to get other children off to a good start, as the mother of five boys, now aged 14 to 25, and as an early learning and child-care professional. She has served as a daycare worker and director, a home visitor with the Parents as Teachers program, an early childhood instructor at Lethbridge College, and an early learning and child-care specialist with Southwest Child and Family Services Authority. She helped to draft and implement a new child care licensing act and dayhome standards in Alberta, establish Parent Link Centres and create 2,500 new child care spaces in her region over a three-year period.

Her position as community development coordinator combines two of her passions: southwest Alberta with its raw, stunning beauty (her zone encompasses Banff, Canmore, Okotoks, Crowsnest Pass and Lethbridge) and early childhood development. She also loves working with rural communities, whose small-town values resonate with her own. "Communities recognize what needs to get done and do it. There's a shared sense of responsibility."

La Vonne is working with communities to map boundaries and identify community resources, interpret research information and build ECD coalitions. She can be reached by e-mail at Lrideout@ualberta.ca. To contact other coordinators, please go to www.ecmap.ca.

Links

ECD Mapping Projects

British Columbia: Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), www.earlylearning.ubc.ca

Manitoba: Healthy Child Manitoba, <http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/index.html>

Australia: Australian Early Development Index, <http://www.aedi.org.au>

Early Development Instrument (EDI)

Offord Centre for Child Studies, www.offordcentre.com

Events

The Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia and Alberta Education, Early Learning Branch is holding a provincial webcast symposium for early childhood professionals, *Inclusion in the Early Years: Promising Practices*, on December 6 in eight locations in Alberta. Please go to www.erc.ca or phone 780.444.2497, ext. 225 or toll free 1-877-244-2497.



Contact us

For further information, please go to www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca

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

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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, provincewide event listings and feedback.

Mapping a bright future for Alberta's young children