

The ECD Evaluation Project – Why It Matters!

January 2010

Overview

Initiated by Success By 6 with funding from the Max Bell Foundation, the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Evaluation Project is a collaborative effort between BC funders and communities. The purpose of the project is to create integrated evaluation and reporting systems for programs supporting healthy early childhood development that will:

- Have the capability to demonstrate province-wide and regional outcomes
- Reduce the reporting burden on ECD programs
- Provide new opportunities for program improvements

Why is this Important?

We now have the ability to measure children’s vulnerability or “readiness” to learn, using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), and around the province, agencies and communities are working to improve outcomes for children.

There are many different types of programs and services, but we don’t have consistent ways of measuring, comparing or reporting on their effectiveness. In addition, there is duplication of effort as different funders design different evaluation and reporting systems. The development of common evaluation frameworks has the potential to enable us to reduce duplication of effort, provide evidence-based methods of evaluating programs and services and afford opportunities to look at the outcomes of different types of programming in the community, regionally and province-wide.



Background

The work of the ECD Evaluation Project is based on the agreement among BC ECD funders on common long term child outcomes. After careful consideration of relevant research, in 2006, the funders¹ adopted the following vision and desired ultimate outcomes, which parallel the reporting requirements of the provinces to the federal government.

Vision: **Children are healthy and develop to their full potential.**

Ultimate Outcomes:

1. **Mothers** are healthy and give birth to healthy **infants** who remain healthy.
2. **Children** experience healthy early child development, including optimal early learning and care.
3. **Parents and families** have the knowledge, resources and support they need to help their children develop to their full potential.
4. **Communities** support the development of all children and families.

To measure progress toward these outcomes, it was decided that common evaluation frameworks would be developed for each of the ultimate outcomes. Key principles guiding the work include simplicity and usefulness for both funders and service providers.



¹ The funders included representatives of: Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Ministry of Health (now Healthy Living and Sport), Ministry of Education, Child and Youth Office, Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), Service Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, National Crime Prevention, City of Vancouver, 2010 Legacies Now, Vancouver Foundation, Success By 6 BC and United Way of the Lower Mainland.

Community Capacity Building - Ultimate Outcome #4

Work first began on Ultimate Outcome #4, relating to community support of children and families. A logic model and data gathering tools were developed and pilot tested in 2007. The evaluation system has been rolled out across the province in 2008 and 2009 and each time refinements have been made to the process and the tools.



Parenting Education and Support – Ultimate Outcome #3

Work on Ultimate Outcome #3 is in the early stages. The following provincial partners are working together: Ministries of Children and Family Development, Education and Healthy Living and Sport, Public Health Agency of Canada, Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), United Way of the Lower Mainland, Success By 6, Children First, BC Council for Families, BC Association of Family Resource Programs, Aboriginal Head Start and the Parenting Vision Working Group.

A logic model and a parent survey have been developed. Wording of the ultimate outcome was refined to reflect provincial inter-ministry discussions: ***Parents are empowered and supported to nurture and care for their children.*** International and national experts reviewed the work and subsequent changes were made to the logic model and parent survey. A psychometrically validated parent survey is being pilot tested in the fall of 2009 by a range of parent education and support programs. These include: Aboriginal Head Start, Baby Time, Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), child care programs that involve parents, Family Resource Programs, Mother Goose and StrongStart BC early learning centres. The parent survey has been translated into 9 languages, to address the ethno-cultural diversity of the parents participating in these programs.

The project has not yet begun work on aligned evaluation frameworks for ultimate outcomes #1 and #2.

How is the information being used?

The information from the community capacity building evaluation is being used locally, regionally and provincially. Across the province, communities discuss the results of their evaluation to identify their successes and challenges, and to develop community action strategies.

Provincially, the value of program evaluation is recognised as a means of enhancing the body of knowledge on child, family and community outcomes, and supporting and promoting ongoing quality improvement and best practices for early years programming.

The information is useful to United Ways, MCFD offices, Credit Unions, Children First and Success By 6 initiatives to inform policy and practice. For example, MCFD Vancouver Coastal Region has aligned its contract language and reporting requirements with the evaluation, thus simplifying the reporting burden for ECD community building initiatives. As well, in the Fraser Region, MCFD and United Way of the Lower Mainland have worked together in two communities to develop a common funding application process, contract language and reporting requirements. One application, one contract and one report are now required, significantly reducing the administrative burden for both agencies and funders.

While the ECD Evaluation Project is relatively young, it is already beginning to affect local, regional and provincial policy and practice. It is hoped that, with time, its potential to further inform provincial and regional policy will be realized.

More information on the ECD Evaluation Project is available on the Success By 6 website, ECD Evaluation page/Resources at <http://www.successby6bc.ca/early-childhood-development/resources>

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