

# Early Years Community Developers of BC November Dialogues

## Summary Report and Action Recommendations



*Early Years Community Developers work with anybody and everybody in communities to support families with young children by promoting the importance of the early years and facilitating community partnerships that make a positive difference for all children.*

November 2009

Please note that this document will evolve as EYCD practitioners take the opportunity to provide written responses to the Provincial Working Group. All feedback, changes, and questions can be directed to Tracy Smyth ([tracy.smyth@viha.ca](mailto:tracy.smyth@viha.ca))

## Background

British Columbia is on the forefront of early years community development (EYCD) activity. Since 2001 there has been a growing number of funded community tables whose specific mandate is to focus local energy and attention towards supporting families with young children. These community early childhood development (ECD) tables have many different names, titles and funding sources. The common ground, however, is *the work* of supporting families with young children through community collaborative processes.

The two initiatives that fund the majority of the early years community development positions are Children First and Success by 6. Along with the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) and the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), a provincial working group jointly identified an opportunity to strengthen partnerships among provincial initiatives with the goal of better meeting the needs of EYCD practitioners. Doing so holds the potential to increase the level of resource sharing, information coordination and professional development, ultimately enhancing EYCD at local, regional and provincial levels. There is a shared belief that strengthening the practice of EYCD Practitioners will contribute to a stronger and more sustainable system for the early years in British Columbia.

Using an online survey, 94 EYCD practitioners contributed their thoughts on having stronger provincial connections. This is an excellent response rate given that there are 79 funded ECD tables in the province. Of the 94 respondents, 86 (89.6%) responded that they were in favour of the notion of developing a “network of support,” 0% responded not in favour, and 10 people (10.4%) were not yet sure.

Three overwhelming themes emerged from the respondents as to why they felt that an effort to create a “professional network” was important.

1. Practitioners value **learning together** – they want to share knowledge, ideas, challenges, skills, and enthusiasm. Many expressed the need to learn and share to decrease their isolation.
2. There is a desire to **better use limited resources** (human and financial). In particular, EYCD practitioners want to avoid duplication and “reinventing the wheel.”
3. There is **strength in numbers**. Practitioners expressed that a large, strong collective provincial voice would give EYCD more credibility.

A scan of the literature describes professional connections under three major categories: **communities of practice, networks and professional associations**. Each of these categories has elements that meet the needs identified by the survey respondents.

**Community of Practice** – a voluntary, informal group with the specific purpose of improving member practice

**Network** – a relationship-based group working with a common conviction or vision. It provides members with an opportunity to exchange information, advice, and support.

**Professional Associations** – a fee-based group (also called a professional body, organization or society) operating as a non-profit organization seeking to further a particular profession and its practitioners.

Practitioners identified the following as the primary barriers to receiving the professional connections and support they need or have to offer others:

- Time
- Distance/geography
- Funding
- Silo-thinking, silo-working, competition between initiatives, and the fear of giving up some control and identity in order to collaborate
- Lack of already developed relationships among coordinators
- Different methodologies and ECD table designs that make it hard to share experiences

In summary, the survey results indicated that EYCD Practitioners wanted *more* connections than they currently experienced and that building on current assets was the way to go versus building a new, separate model of interaction. The next step of the process was to host two face-to-face opportunities to engage EYCD practitioners in a series of dialogues. The following sections bring together the input from both opportunities (Nov 9<sup>th</sup>, Nov 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009) and provide a summary of the four dialogues topics.

The final section of this report includes draft recommendations created by the provincial working group based on practitioner input to date.

## **Dialogue #1 - Strength in Numbers EYCD Connections**

The objective of the first dialogue was to explore what professional EYCD connections are currently working and not working for practitioners both regionally and provincially.

### What is currently WORKING?

- Some regional and sub-regional connections exist
- Strong bridge exists between research (HELP) and communities
- Interior has regional support person, meetings and newsletters
- Multi-initiative, integrated funding model occurs in some areas

### What is NOT WORKING?

- No orientation for new coordinators
- Lack of provincial leadership and vision
- No contact list
- Lack of advocacy (regional and provincial)
- Too few hours for many coordinators – part time positions
- Child & Youth Special Needs connections and burden of mandate
- Lack of provincial commitment to EYCD
- Limited access to training
- Not enough information flowing to decrease rumours and uncertainty
- Some internet barriers in remote parts of BC
- Disconnection exists between EYCDers and other regional/provincial groups (e.g. Child & Youth Committees, CAPC, MCFD, SPARC, Council of ECD, Chamber of Commerce, school districts, health authorities, regional districts)

## Dialogue #2 - Learning Together Professional Learning Priorities

The second dialogue focused specifically on the kinds of topics that EYCD Practitioners wanted to learn to support their work. The process for this activity allowed topics to be clustered by theme and then prioritized.

- # 1 ***Influencing policy change*** (20 stars)
  - "Politics of Planning" at local, regional, provincial, and national levels
- # 2 ***Marketing/Public Relations*** (19 stars)
  - Social marketing
  - Storytelling
  - Power Points about EYCD
  - Resource of one-liners
- # 3 ***Technology*** (15 stars)
  - Software
  - Social networking
  - Photography (digital storytelling)
- # 4 ***Community Development "how to's"*** (13 stars)
  - Team building, conflict resolution, group facilitation
  - Community leadership and relationship building
  - Art of Hosting – convening conversations that matter
- # 5 ***Strategies for "15 by 15" advocacy*** (9 stars)

Other:

- Succession planning
- Language of economics
- More EDI training
- Community capacity building
- Programs and services that support each developmental domain
- Working in aboriginal and other multicultural communities
- Public speaking
- Memorandums of Understandings
- Best practices: Cities fit for children
- Transition planning for MoE's role in ECD
- Event planning
- Mentoring
- Social enterprise
- Developing indicators
- Fundraising
- Investment management (contracts/grants)



## How??

### By building on our strengths and taking bold steps!

The last dialogue encouraged EYCD Practitioners to consider the practical ways in which the EYCD profession can move towards improving connections and achieving the three needs identified for a “professional network”:

**learn together...better use limited resources...create strength in numbers**

#### 1. Research, Evaluation & Experience

- Use and build upon our common evaluation
- Formalize connection with HELP
- Learn from others: Europe & Pan Canadian Community Practice research

#### 2. Passionate & Innovative Action

- Harness the desire to become a recognized “profession”
- Harvest impact stories and community plans/activities
- Begin to define common standards for EYCDers
- Articulate a shared vision, community development definition, and ethical guidelines
- Get behind a collective message – possibly 15 by 15
- Have fun together – be fearless
- Create a Kick-Ass name

#### 3. Relationships & Mobilization

- Catalogue our diverse experiences and expertise – maintain a database and provide opportunities to share
- Explore professional networks and connections to assess reach and strategize to widen influence – e.g. big business, ministries, treasury board, and other community developers...
- Identify national and international connections
- Know and develop relationship with Community Service Managers/ministry reps
- Maintain ability to meet face to face
  - o joint conferences
  - o informal gatherings important
  - o two times per year
- Foster consistent regional connections and face to face get-togethers

#### 4. Big Picture Systems

- Ask for what we want from the 3 engaged Ministries (MCFD, Health, MoE): sustainability, provincial coordination, professional recognition
- Seek outside funding for provincial coordination
- Utilize infrastructure at HELP and Sby6 Provincial Office
- Define advocacy role in province
- Examine financial equity among regions and communities
- Strategize vision beyond age 6 (to include middle child and youth)
- Consider different models to operate
  - o Sby6/CF amalgamate
  - o Expand EYCD Provincial Advisory Table to include: Sby6, CF, CAPC, CPNP, UEY, HELP, MCFD, MOE, SD Early Learning, Literacy, CCRR, First Call, Health, IDP, SCD, AIDP, ASCD, Aboriginal Authorities, ECEBC -----all to maintain individual brands and identities
  - o Place all \$ on table and redesign model
  - o Learn from integrated initiatives
  - o Develop role of regional ECD people to mentor/assist new coordinators

#### 5. Technology

- Reduce 3 websites (HELP, Sby6, CF) to one
- Find ways to share huge resource of presentations and templates
- Send out newsletters and helpful tools directly to EYCDers
- Support technology-based learning opportunities (webinars, video conferencing, multi-site training)
- Create a virtual community for ongoing learning and support
  - o hosted on sby6 knowledge network or HELP or CF
  - o coordinator forum
  - o public forum
  - o facebook group
  - o twitter
  - o page for each initiative

## Recommendations for Action

The Provincial Working Group is energized by the input from EYCD Practitioners to date. The group feels confident that moving towards creating an EYCD “professional network” is supported across the province. The survey and dialogues have informed a number of action recommendations.

- A. Send written report to Early Years Community Developers for feedback.
  - a. Distribute electronically
  - b. Participate in Aboriginal Coordinators Conference Call (January)
  - c. Encourage discussion at any regional meetings (January)
  
- B. Create EYCD contact database.
  - a. HELP has contracted FirstCall to complete this work.
  - b. Strategize ways to keep information current and inclusive.
  
- C. Submit a funding proposal (with HELP as lead) to build and sustain an EYCD professional body in BC. The proposal will request funding to:
  - a. Designate a primary contact organization.
  - b. Support an annual regional gathering (possibly in conjunction with regional EDI presentations).
  - c. Host a provincial gathering for EYCDers to network and to meet professional learning needs.
  - d. Address identified professional learning needs through a variety of medium (e.g. newsletter/tip sheets, webinars, interactive multi-site conference).
  - e. Establish a social networking presence.
  
- D. Convene EYCD Provincial Working Group in February 2010. Agenda to include:
  - a. Funding proposal
  - b. Ways to stay connected to identified potential partners (CAPC, CPNP, UEY, HELP, MCFD, MOE, SD Early Learning, Literacy, CCRR, First Call, Health, IDP, SCD, AIDP, ASCD, Aboriginal Authorities, ECEBC)
  - c. Ideas to equitably reduce travel barriers to provincial face-to-face gatherings - registration fee to subsidize travel, 1% budget contributions
  
- E. Host a 2<sup>nd</sup> provincial gathering.
  - a. Piggyback date onto HELP EDI event – Vancouver, May 2010
  - b. Agenda to include ongoing conversation and mobilization around action recommendations
  - c. Widen participation to include School District Early Learning Leads, Community Literacy Coordinators and Child Care Resource and Referral Consultants.

Dear Early Years Community Developer;

Thanks for taking the time to read this document and for taking advantage of the survey and/or dialogues to engage in this process. The Provincial Working Group hopes that you both feel informed about the process and feel that your voice is reflected in the summary.

In order to continue a provincial dialogue and continue to learn from each other, PLEASE email your thoughts and feedback!

***Possible Feedback questions:***

***What from this document resonates the most with you?***

***What would you add or take away from the action recommendations?***

***Do you have ideas to:***

- a) keep the EYCD contact database current and inclusive?***
- b) equitably reduce travel barriers for face-to-face gatherings***
- c) create a kick-ass name for an EYCD professional body?***

Thank you! Please feel free to email any one of us from the Provincial Working Group:

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