The cover features a white background with several large, semi-circular shapes in purple and green. A vertical line of small circles, alternating in color, descends from the top purple shape. A large green circle on the right contains several smaller purple circles. A child is visible at the bottom left, and another purple circle is at the bottom center.

Understanding the
Early Years (UEY)
Niagara Falls Project

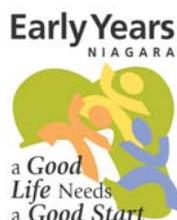
ACTION PLAN

March 2004



Acknowledgements

This action plan was developed by UEY Coordinator Lori Walker, in partnership with Andrew Taylor & Becky Choma of the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services. Special thanks go to the UEY Niagara Falls Project Steering Committee members, past and present, who possess both the insight and passion to work towards improving the lives of young children in the Niagara Region.



A Note about Acronyms

Throughout this document, several acronyms are used repeatedly. This index may be helpful.

CMS	Community Mapping Study
DAC	Data Analysis Coordinator <i>Local community research position funded by the Ontario Early Years initiative</i>
ECCDC	Early Childhood Community Development Centre <i>Sponsor and host of the Understanding the Early Years Niagara Falls Project</i>
EDI	Early Development Instrument
EYAG-NR	Early Years Action Group - Niagara Region <i>Sponsor of the Understanding the Early Years Niagara Falls Project</i>
EYN	Early Years Niagara <i>Cross-sectoral coalition addressing early years issues in Niagara Region</i>
EYNRAG	Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada <i>Funder of Understanding the Early Years</i>
NLSCY	National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth
OEY	Ontario Early Years <i>A set of provincially funded early years programs and services</i>
OEYC	Ontario Early Years Centre
PREP unit	Planning, Research, Evaluation and Policy unit, Regional Municipality of Niagara Public Health Department <i>Where the Data Analysis Coordinator is housed.</i>
SDC	Social Development Canada (a branch of the former Human Resources Development Canada) <i>Funder of Understanding the Early Years</i>
UEY	Understanding the Early Years <i>A federal research and development project that looks at community impacts on child development</i>
UEY Niagara Falls	The local project site of the Understanding the Early Years Initiative

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SECTION I Overview

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is an initiative of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC)¹ that provides research information on the extent and nature of community influences on child development, while enhancing community capacity to use this data to make informed decisions about the best policies and practices to support families with young children. In December 2000, the city of Niagara Falls was chosen as one of twelve communities across Canada to take part in this Initiative. The UEY Project in Niagara Falls is sponsored by the Early Years Action Group-Niagara Region (EYAG-NR) and the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC).²

From the beginning, local UEY Projects were intended to be catalysts for further action. The federal UEY Initiative describes its purpose as providing answers to the question *"how are our children doing now?"* so that communities and governments can develop policies, programs, and services that best promote the well-being of our children. Communities involved in the UEY Initiative were asked to "put in place action plans that will help their children—both before and after they enter school—reach their full potential in life."³

This plan outlines action strategies and recommended approaches for the UEY Niagara Falls Project in 2004/2005. It is intended for two key audiences: the Project funder; and partners (comprised of Project sponsors, steering committee, and staff). In creating this plan, the authors incorporated action elements that have already been articulated and (in some cases) implemented, as well as additional steps that key partners in the UEY Niagara Falls Project agree ought to be taken as the process moves ahead.

There are four sections in this document. The first three sections are primarily intended for the Project funder and sponsors. These sections provide background information on the federal UEY Initiative and the organizational context of the UEY Niagara Falls Project. Section Three reviews and acknowledges the hard work and accomplishments of the Niagara Falls Project to date. Section Four is intended for the UEY Niagara Falls Project Steering Committee and staff and will be used as a directional piece to guide and inform their work in 2004/2005. The action steps outlined in Section Four, along with discussions of rationale, timelines, and priorities, emerged from interviews conducted with the Steering Committee as part of the action planning process.

This action plan is intended as a comprehensive and critical summary of key elements of the UEY Niagara Falls Project. It is hoped that this document will be a useful waypoint for those involved in Niagara's ongoing efforts to build child and family friendly communities.

This action plan presents concrete proposals for action in four key areas:

- ➊ Sharing Research Information with the Community
- ➋ Supporting Ongoing Research
- ➌ Sustaining a Local Research Agenda
- ➍ Ongoing Monitoring & Evaluation

¹ In 2004, the branch of HRDC responsible for UEY became known as Social Development Canada (SDC)

² Further background information on the UEY federal research initiative in Niagara Falls and related topics can be found in a variety of documents. The names and locations of these documents are found in Appendix C of this action plan.

³ Federal HRDC Understanding the Early Years website: <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sp-ps/arb-dgra/nlscy-clnej/uey-cpe/uey.shtml>.

The UEY Niagara Falls Project is sponsored by the Early Years Action Group - Niagara Region (EYAG-NR) and the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC). The EYAG-NR is a self-organized, community coalition dedicated to increasing opportunities for optimal early childhood development and parenting in the Niagara Region. The ECCDC is a regional, non-profit, community-based development organization that provides information and services to those involved in the care and education of children. Together, the EYAG-NR and the ECCDC have been working with community partners to support the UEY Niagara Falls Project since December 2000.

The UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee is comprised of 14 members, all with a vested interest in the Project and a common goal of its success. Generally, the Steering Committee guides, advocates, and supports the UEY Niagara Falls Project and the UEY Coordinator in her mandate.

It is also the role of the Steering Committee to ensure that the UEY Niagara Falls Project results are communicated to parties that may have a stake in the Project, or benefit from the Project's research findings, and to ensure that these results are used in the community. Furthermore, members of the Steering Committee have taken responsibility for developing plans to extend components of UEY (the Early Development Instrument and community mapping) across the Niagara Region through the attainment of future and continuing research, support, and funding.

The UEY Steering Committee for Niagara Falls is made up of representatives from:

- Brock University ~ Research Department
- Community at large
- District School Board of Niagara
- Early Childhood Community Development Centre
- Early Years Action Group - Niagara Region
- Early Years Niagara/Business Education Council
- Niagara Catholic District School Board
- Niagara College ~ Early Childhood Education Program
- Ontario Early Years Centres Niagara
- Ontario Early Years Initiative ~ Data Analysis Coordinator
- Regional Municipality of Niagara, Community Services Department, Children's Services Division
- Regional Municipality of Niagara, Public Health Department, PREP Unit and Healthy Babies Healthy Children

UEY Research Framework

The UEY framework developed by HRDC and implemented in Niagara Falls by the local Steering Committee is based on three research tools that measure and collect community data:

1. **Early Development Instrument (EDI)** ~ a population-based measure designed to profile child development outcomes in terms of school readiness
2. **National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) Community Study** ~ a Statistics Canada tool that gathers detailed information from families to determine the importance of community factors on child development, as compared to individual and family factors
3. **Community Mapping Study (CMS)** ~ gathers information on the socioeconomic and physical characteristics of communities and the programs and services offered to families with children

UEY Goals

UEY activities can be divided into two main categories. The first category is data collection and analysis. Activities in this category are focused on research, with the goal of providing communities with the data necessary to develop informed action plans to improve children's early years and support families. The first cycle of data collection in Niagara Falls began in 2001 with the implementation of the EDI, the NLSCY Community Study, and the CMS. This cycle concluded in 2003 with the release of the Niagara Falls Integrated Report, one in a series of national community research documents published by HRDC. The information gathered in Niagara Falls helped to:

-
- assess children's skills in terms of school readiness;
 - explain community factors that influence early childhood development; and
 - provide a foundation to support healthy child development.
-

The goal of the UEY Initiative is to help communities understand how their children are doing and how, as a community, they can best respond to their children's needs. Improving our understanding of factors that impact child development and increasing community tracking of how well children are developing is crucial to ensuring the best possible start for children.

On a broader level, this data also provided an information base to build upon in order to impact national children's policies by contributing to the national knowledge about children's readiness to learn and the role of communities in improving outcomes for children.

While the Integrated Report marked the completion of the first cycle of data collection in Niagara Falls, a second EDI measure was conducted in 2003. This additional data increased the Project's knowledge of early childhood development in Niagara Falls.

The second category of activities is focused on knowledge transfer and application. The goal of these activities is to share the results of data collection and analysis through an interactive process involving the communication, adoption, and integration of research findings for action within the community. The purpose of sharing research findings with the community is to foster better outcomes for children. The specific objectives for knowledge transfer and application are found in Appendix A. Since data collection activities have continued, these objectives have become ongoing (i.e. there is an ongoing effort to share results with the community as data collection continues).

UEY is intended to offer insight into the ways in which research can precipitate strategies and decision making to improve child developmental outcomes. UEY also works to promote collaboration and the sharing of expertise in and among communities; and provides a foundation on which to increase community knowledge. By disseminating research findings to a wide audience (i.e. at the local, provincial, and national levels), UEY encourages dialogue among researchers and contributes to national knowledge about the readiness to learn of children country-wide and the role of communities in improving outcomes for children. Ultimately, it is hoped that UEY will help to inform the development of national policy.

SECTION 3 Capacities and Accomplishments

Understanding the Local Context

In order to appreciate the impact of the UEY Initiative on Niagara Falls, it is important to understand the context within which it has functioned. Between 2001 and 2003, there were two important developments in the local system of early years supports, both of which interacted with the UEY Niagara Falls Project: the introduction of the Ontario Early Years (OEY) Initiative; and the development of the Early Years Niagara (EYN) governance model.

Ontario Early Years (OEY) Initiative

In 2001, the Province appointed a provisional OEY Steering Committee for the Niagara Region with the task of conducting a region-wide community inventory and EDI measure. This put Niagara in a unique situation, enabling the Region to benefit from both a federal and provincial focus on early years research.

The OEY Steering Committee was a temporary structure, appointed in August 2001 and dissolved in March 2002. From the outset, it was clear that this time constraint would impact on the Committee's ability to carry out research on a regional scale. The Committee recognized that the capacity to undertake the region-wide community inventory and EDI had already been established through the work of the UEY Niagara Falls Project. In September 2001, the OEY Steering Committee partnered with UEY sponsors: EYAG-NR, and the ECCDC. As a result, UEY Niagara Falls staff undertook the task of completing this research on behalf of the OEY Steering Committee and Niagara became one of the first regions in Ontario to implement the EDI measure under the OEY Initiative.

Local stakeholders agree that cooperation between the federal and provincial early years ventures in the Niagara Region has been excellent. Although their geographic focus is different, the two initiatives have worked together closely from the very beginning and have benefited greatly from the partnership.

The time-limited projects of the OEY Steering Committee eventually evolved into several ongoing initiatives, two of which had important connections to the work of UEY. These were the Early Years Data Analysis Coordinator (DAC) position and the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs).

In April 2002, the local Early Years DAC was hired. Housed in the Planning, Research, Evaluation and Policy (PREP) unit of the Regional Municipality of Niagara Public Health Department, the DAC was given the mandate to continue to build upon the regional data collection and interpretation work begun by UEY Project staff on behalf of the OEY Steering Committee. After some initial efforts to clarify their respective roles in this ongoing work, the DAC and the UEY Project have worked together closely. Currently, the UEY Niagara Falls Project is working with the DAC to interpret the findings of the Niagara Regional EDI measure and collaborate on communication pieces to share results with communities.

In 2002, four provincially funded OEYCs were established in the Niagara Region, one of which is located in the city of Niagara Falls. Because both UEY and the local OEYC are in close proximity, they are able to work together on data collection and interpretation.

Early Years Niagara (EYN)

Since its formation in 1998, the Early Years Action Group - Niagara Region (EYAG-NR) has been raising community awareness on the importance of the early years and mobilizing support for optimal child development and parenting in Niagara. While the self-organized EYAG-NR became a driving force in Niagara, their work was somewhat limited in that they lacked the formal governance required to flow funding. In 2002 the EYAG-NR began a strategic planning process that led them to adopt a new organizational structure under a lead agency, the Business Education Council of Niagara (BEC).

BEC is a non-profit corporation with a mandate to promote active communication between business and educators. In January 2003 BEC received funding from the province of Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services, to establish a new coordinating body for early years services - Early Years Niagara (EYN). EYN is supported by:

- Regional Municipality of Niagara;
- Government of Ontario;
- Kenneth Fowler Foundation;
- Hewlett Packard;
- Branscombe Family Foundation;
- United Way ~ St. Catharines District;
- Computers for Schools Ontario; and
- Niagara Credit Union.

Operating under the umbrella of BEC, the EYAG-NR transitioned to EYN. EYN then acquired funding for staff and began to develop a new, more ambitious and inclusive vision and governance model for the coordination of early years work in the Niagara Region.

The new EYN model is comprised of an executive level committee (EYAG-NR) and a community council made up of representatives from the four OEY ridings, which cover the twelve municipalities of the Niagara Region. An Early Years Coordinator will liaise between these two bodies and there will be a number of "advisory groups" that feed information into this overall structure.

UEY Steering Committee Transition

In support of the implementation of EYN's new model for the coordination of early years work in the Niagara Region, the Steering Committee of the UEY Niagara Falls Project recently decided to extend their mandate and become the Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group (EYNRAG). EYNRAG will report to the EYN executive and the community council through the Early Years Coordinator. The group has outlined several specific objectives and tasks for itself (see appendices D and E), many of which are incorporated into this action plan in the next section.

UEY Steering Committee Transition ~ continued

Eventually, it is anticipated that EYNRAG will grow to become an umbrella for early years research initiatives across the Niagara Region and that the UEY Niagara Falls Project will be just one component of their larger mandate. The regional focus of this group will help to ensure continued collaboration between UEY and the DAC; maximize federal, provincial, and regional resources; avoid duplication; and assist in providing coordination throughout the Niagara Region. While this action plan outlines recommended steps for the UEY Niagara Falls Project, many of the tasks and functions described will be common to both UEY and EYNRAG. At the time that this plan was developed, the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee had just begun the process of transitioning into EYNRAG (see Table 5) and, for all intents and purposes, these were still one and the same group.

Key Accomplishments of the UEY Niagara Falls Project

The UEY Niagara Falls Project has been gathering and disseminating data since 2001. A summary of current Project reports is found below.

-
- *Measuring Readiness to Learn in Niagara Falls: The Early Development Instrument Findings. Understanding the Early Years Community Research in Child Development (2001)*
-

The main objective of this report is to present and discuss the findings from the 2001 Early Development Instrument (EDI) measure in Niagara Falls. The results presented in this report are descriptive in nature and profile Senior Kindergarten children's readiness to learn in terms of how prepared they were for school entry.

-
- *Measuring Readiness to Learn in Niagara Falls: Results of the Community Mapping Study in Niagara Falls. Understanding the Early Years Community Research in Child Development (2001)*
-

This report presents findings from the 2001 Community Mapping Study (CMS), which examined the physical, social and economic characteristics associated with child development in Niagara Falls. These results are intended to create a framework for community discussions on how to develop strategies and allocate resources with the goal of optimizing child development.

UEY Niagara Falls Project Findings

UEY findings to date have found that the children of Niagara Falls are generally fortunate: they live in safe, stable neighbourhoods with a high level of social support. Parents are engaged with their children and make use of community resources. These factors have undoubtedly contributed to Niagara Falls' success in the development of its young children, even though the majority of its neighbourhoods are of low to medium socioeconomic status.

There is room for improvement, however. In 2001, approximately 29% of Senior Kindergarten children in Niagara Falls lacked readiness skills in one or more of the developmental areas measured by the EDI.

While children scored well on the EDI overall, scores for Emotional Maturity were relatively low. Subsequent data collection showed that low Emotional Maturity scores in Niagara Falls might be attributed to children's lack of prosocial skills and a high prevalence of behaviours associated with hyperactivity.

While these results provide a baseline for tracking child development outcomes in Niagara Falls, further research is needed to see if any patterns emerge.

Key Accomplishments of the UEY Niagara Falls Project ~ continued

- *Understanding the Early Years: Early Childhood Development in Niagara Falls, Ontario.* KSI Research International Inc., Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada (June 2003).
-

This 2003 document is often referred to as the “*Integrated Report*” because it successfully integrates data collected from the EDI, NLSCY Community Study, and CMS in Niagara Falls and puts this information into a local, provincial, and national context. The report describes children’s outcomes, explaining them in terms of three factors:

- ❶ family background (i.e. information on parents’ income, level of education, and occupational status);
- ❷ family processes (i.e. parenting practices, engagement in learning activities, family functioning, and maternal mental health); and
- ❸ community factors (i.e. social support, social capital, neighbourhood quality and safety, residential stability, and use of recreational, cultural and educational resources).

The various ways in which these factors impact children’s development are discussed, along with suggested measures to help families and community leaders in Niagara Falls improve children’s development.

In interviews conducted for this action plan, members of the UEY Niagara Falls Project Steering Committee commented that Project reports have been thorough and well presented. In fact, there was a great deal of consensus amongst members about what they considered to be successful elements of the Project. In particular, several interviewees made the following points.

- The work and continual dedication of the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee to maintain the success of UEY cannot go without recognition. Steering committee members are dedicated to a process characterized by collaboration and teamwork. They use this process to define and understand various concepts and decisions related to the UEY Project. Members of the Steering Committee continue to respect each partner’s perspective and ensure that each member is heard.
- The UEY Niagara Falls Project has brought many community partners together with a common goal. This group includes key organizations and individuals who had not worked together intensively prior to the Project. In particular, Steering Committee members were enthusiastic about new partnerships with school boards and the local university. Community partners learned how to work together to develop and achieve collaborative objectives.
- UEY Niagara Falls has been a model for other communities interested in evidence-based planning for young children and their families. UEY Niagara Falls staff have made presentations in other communities, and there have been many visitors to Niagara Falls interested in the Project. The Regional Municipality of Niagara is justifiably proud of the role some local leaders have played in provincial and federal developments around the early years. The local Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Robin Williams, has been able to make use of the Niagara story in her work as an advocate actively involved in planning and policy development at a provincial level and this work has in turn given local efforts in the Niagara Region a higher provincial profile.

Key Accomplishments of the UEY Niagara Falls Project ~ continued

- The UEY Niagara Falls Project has advanced local understanding of key issues facing children and families. Data gathered through the Project have been shared with a variety of organizations, from social service agencies - to municipal governments - to service clubs. Although experienced service providers often felt that they already had a good personal understanding of key local issues, the research evidence generated by the UEY Project affirmed, clarified, and legitimized these perceptions. This integration of different approaches to identifying local issues lent new power and credibility to efforts to address them.

Part of the intent of UEY is that the analyses of EDI and CMS data will inform the development of new early years programming and services. The products of the UEY Niagara Falls Project have already been used in this way. For example, based on EDI and NLSCY Community Study findings that show a lack of prosocial skills and relatively low emotional maturity scores at the Senior Kindergarten level, the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC) in Niagara Falls has increased its focus on social-emotional development when programming activities. In addition, the Centre has displayed posters about feelings and included information about developmental stages and the importance of play in newsletters to educate parents. The Centre Manager reports that these steps were taken as a direct result of the UEY findings in Niagara Falls.

Tables 1-3 in this report provide examples of ways in which UEY Niagara Falls Project findings have been used on a local, provincial, and federal level.

TABLE 1 EXAMPLES OF LOCAL/REGIONAL USE OF UEY NIAGARA FALLS FINDINGS

ORGANIZATION	SCOPE: LOCAL/REGIONAL
Brock University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highlighted the UEY community research model through a variety of presentations to faculty and students of the University Research Department, Special Needs Education, and Child and Youth Studies Department (Graduate Program) ● UEY staff collaborated with a Graduate student to analyze Niagara Regional EDI data
Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnered with UEY to bring expert speakers to the community, raising awareness of the importance of the early years ● Utilized the UEY Project and findings for the focus of annual conferences including the 2002 <i>Connecting Research to Practice Conference</i> and 2004 <i>Niagara Summit on Human Development</i> ● Compiled, published, and distributed lists of emotional and social development support materials available through the ECCDC's Resource Library ● Regularly profile Project findings in their <i>Community Update</i> newsletter
District School Board of Niagara (DSBN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cited UEY results in a proposal to Special Education and Curriculum Services in support of the pilot project <i>ROAD (Reframing Our Approach to Discipline)</i> designed to foster social and emotional development in elementary school children ● Partnered with UEY to bring experts to the community to address social-emotional development issues with teachers and parents

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

ORGANIZATION	SCOPE: LOCAL/REGIONAL
<p>Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB)</p> <hr/> <p>NCDSB produced the following list of action directives based on EDI findings:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UEY evidence supports findings from research on compensatory schools conducted by the NCDSB Research, Assessment, and Evaluation Department. Collectively, findings will be used to allocate resources such as <i>Reading Recovery</i> Teachers and Educational Assistants • EDI data on 5-6 year olds will be used in conjunction with at-risk data on 7-14 year olds to provide information to principals on students who are not meeting provincial standards. This will help inform the use of tools such as <i>Reading Running Records</i>, <i>PM Bench Marks</i> (a diagnostic tool for assessing reading level), and after-school programs • Professional development on <i>Evidence-Based Decision Making and Target Setting</i> will be planned for principals, using EDI data in conjunction with Board information • Physical health and well-being findings will be used in conjunction with QDPA (<i>Quality Daily Physical Activity</i>) research data for programming purposes • EDI gender analysis findings on language & cognitive development and communication skills & general knowledge were used in conjunction with data from the NCDSB Research Department to support a Board focus on boys and literacy • EDI findings on ESL versus non-ESL students were used in conjunction with data from the Board’s Research Department to identify ESL students and literacy as a priority • Social competence and emotional maturity findings may be used with local data from research on youth to give a global perspective on systemic needs within schools and support programs such as <i>Lion’s Quest</i> to teach appropriate social skills • EDI findings in the domains of social competence and emotional maturity may be used with external Board research findings from the University of Guelph on socialization, for principals to implement programs that teach and reinforce appropriate social skills • Social competence and emotional maturity findings may be used in conjunction with anti-bullying survey data to select appropriate programs and early intervention strategies for schools
<p>Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC) Niagara Falls</p> <p>(Lead agency: Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB))</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered results when planning sites for mobile resources and satellite services • Stipulated in purchase of service agreements that all satellite programming include social and emotional skill development • Trained staff to identify social-emotional deficiencies and incorporate social and emotional skill development into program planning • Purchased social-emotional development resources, for use in the Centre and for loan to parents/community; • Utilized UEY data in a successful Challenge Fund bid to design an interactive readiness for school program called <i>Count Me In</i>, for parents/caregivers and children that will build on numeracy awareness and the development of social/emotional skills • Partnered with UEY Niagara Falls to host a community information forum focussed on local results

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

ORGANIZATION	SCOPE: LOCAL/REGIONAL
Regional Municipality of Niagara, Public Health Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UEY information contributed to the focus of the <i>Brock Parenting Conference</i>, an annual event coordinated by the Public Health Department • Findings related to the importance of social-emotional development supported Public Health Nurses' knowledge and skills regarding parenting and attachment.

TABLE 2 EXAMPLES OF PROVINCIAL USE OF UEY NIAGARA FALLS FINDINGS

ORGANIZATION	SCOPE: PROVINCIAL
Ontario Early Years Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UEY Coordinator attended provincial meetings of the Early Years Coordinators and consulted on methodology regarding EDI implementation, program inventories, and community mapping • The OEY Steering Committee engaged the UEY Niagara Falls Project to conduct a region-wide EDI and CMS based on UEY methodology
Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed UEY findings when planning for relocation of a critical program/service
University of Guelph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychology student, Angela Di Nello used UEY aggregate data for applied GIS (Geographic Information Systems) research: <i>A GIS Approach to Siting an Educational Resource for Vulnerable Children in the city of Niagara Falls (2004)</i>. http://www.geography.uoguelph.ca/research/geog4480_w2004/index.htm

TABLE 3 EXAMPLES OF FEDERAL USE OF UEY NIAGARA FALLS FINDINGS

ORGANIZATION	SCOPE: FEDERAL
Social Development Canada (formerly Human Resources Development Canada)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed to national data collection, resulting in a series of integrated reports on community research on child development in Canada

SECTION 4 Action Plan

The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS), in partnership with the UEY Niagara Falls Project Coordinator, prepared this action plan to be utilized by the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee. The plan summarizes information from several sources. Interviews were conducted with UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee members in December 2003 and January 2004 (see Appendix B for interview questions). A review and analysis of Project reports was also completed (see Appendix C) and a community feedback forum was held in December 2003. In March 2004, the Steering Committee members reviewed a draft of this document and made recommendations as to its content. Any necessary changes were then incorporated into the action plan presented here.

Although much has already been done with the products created by the UEY Niagara Falls Project, Steering Committee members and partners felt that there was more potential. When asked, interviewees suggested many possible “next steps” that could be taken with the work. This section identifies and discusses four key areas suggested for further action:

- ❶ Sharing Research Information with Community Stakeholders
- ❷ Supporting Ongoing Research
- ❸ Sustaining a Local Research Agenda
- ❹ Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

Concrete tasks and functions are identified and discussed for each of these four areas. Consideration has been given to the objectives of both UEY and the wider EYNRAG as the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee is in a state of transition.

Sharing Research Information with Community Stakeholders

Both the UEY objectives (Appendix A) and the EYNRAG terms of reference (Appendix D) place high priority on ongoing dissemination of research-based information. Two of EYNRAG’s four objectives deal with information sharing:

- To enhance collaboration and facilitate the sharing of information regarding research in Niagara relevant to the early years; and
- To ensure that early years research data is available to:
 - assist in the development of new early years programming and services;
 - assist in the development of new early years research projects; and
 - inform the development of plans to monitor the progress of children.

Sharing Research Information with Community Stakeholders ~ continued

Steering Committee members interviewed agreed that the information gathered by the UEY Niagara Falls Project needs to continue to get out into the community. Although much dissemination work has been done, there are still sectors of the community that are unaware of UEY and its findings. ***Future dissemination efforts should try to target groups not yet reached***, including health care professionals, child care providers, parents, clergy, politicians, and business professionals. Information generated by the Project should be shared with people in these sectors, and efforts should be made to seek feedback and input from them.

EYNRAG members and UEY Niagara Falls partners need to be active participants in communicating UEY research findings in a meaningful way to various parties that could utilize this information.

While the exchange of information with new sectors of the community is important, it is only a first step. ***Efforts should be made to get new partners actively involved in the work of the UEY Niagara Falls Project***. For example, doctors, child care providers, and parents may have unique perspectives to bring to the table, and local results may be helpful in building their interest. Through partnership and collaboration with Brock University and Niagara College, the Project and its data may be used as a learning tool. Learning about the UEY initiative will enable students to conceptualize research and learn how it can direct action. Furthermore, UEY data could be analyzed by students in research

projects conducted in collaboration with, and guidance from, UEY Niagara Falls and school boards, benefiting both the Project and students.

Awareness-raising and communication efforts should incorporate a variety of venues and strategies.

One example of a possible venue/strategy is a community forum where feedback is gathered from parties who receive information about findings. Interviewees suggested that the UEY Niagara Falls Project create various types of communication/awareness tools (i.e. short reports, fact sheets, etc.) for distribution and use, and tailor these products to suit the needs of specific audiences.

Table 4 summarizes concrete steps for action that relate to sharing research information. It includes strategies that have been identified by EYNRAG, as well as additional strategies that have emerged from consultation with the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee during the development of this action plan. Each “action strategy” is identified as either a “task” (a concrete action to be taken at a specific point in time or at regular intervals) or a “function” (an important ongoing role that needs to be filled locally and may lead to multiple tasks over time). The “recommended approach” column summarizes suggestions and comments about how each of these action steps might best be implemented by the Steering Committee under the umbrella of EYNRAG. Similar tables (one for each of the four major action areas) follow in later sections of this plan.

TABLE 4 SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION - ACTION STRATEGIES

ACTION STRATEGY	RECOMMENDED APPROACH
<p>TASK Contribute to the development and distribution of an EYN report card on the health and well-being of children in Niagara with comparisons to Ontario</p>	<p>Support the EYN to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the best use of resources • Identify and access appropriate resources to sustain this strategy • Consider the most effective formats to target different audiences/sectors • Build in forums for critical reflection and discussion
<p>TASK Compile and distribute an inventory of early years related research currently being implemented across Niagara Region</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with Brock University and Niagara College to collect data • Target unreached sectors • Focus on existing community capacity and the maximization of resources for the development of early years services and plans • Create new research partnerships
<p>FUNCTION Assist EYNRAG to guide the dissemination of Niagara Regional EDI and community mapping data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in close collaboration with the DAC to support wider OEY Initiative mandates • Use multiple formats to target different sectors • Involve new sectors actively in use of data
<p>TASK Tailor existing reports and dissemination approaches to effectively meet the needs of key audiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with different sectors to determine efficient means for disseminating data • Adapt and develop multiple formats to target different sectors (i.e. fact sheets, web sites, newsletters) • Focus on coordinated early years services
<p>FUNCTION Encourage key groups (i.e. parents, doctors, child care sector) to become actively involved with UEY in general and the formation of a local research agenda in particular</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively engage groups around UEY Niagara Falls findings • Focus on the need for coordinated early years services

Supporting Ongoing Research

New empirical information often leads to valuable insights about community needs. However, at the same time, it can bring into sharper relief the many questions that remain unanswered. For this reason, there is an ongoing need to support evidence-based research on early years issues and to ensure that accurate data, based on the most up-to-date research tools and techniques, is available to policy and decision makers. More data, as well as different kinds of data, will add credibility to findings and actions based on those findings.

Supporting Ongoing Research ~ continued

For this reason, one of the core objectives of EYNRAG is:

- to facilitate early years research initiatives sponsored by EYN.

Interviewees identified several specific areas where they saw a ***need for local research that will build on the UEY Project framework to address gaps in current knowledge.*** These are:

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- EDI and community mapping data should be made available for the entire Niagara Region, broken down by neighbourhoods
 - EDI data, census information, and other relevant data should be gathered regularly, so that eventually long-term trends in child and family health can be plotted
 - In order to complement the quantitative and descriptive information gathered to date, more qualitative and analytic data about child development and the best ways to nurture it should be gathered from key groups including teachers, parents, and child care professionals.
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The UEY Niagara Falls Project should make every effort to share data and resources with the OEYCs; the DAC; Children’s Services; the Regional Niagara Public Health Department; City Planning; and any other relevant parties. Readiness to learn is just one indicator of child development; more data on determinants of health and child development should be gathered and examined in a community context. Enhanced data sharing among EYNRAG partners and community groups could assist in interpreting UEY findings and help to develop a more comprehensive picture of child development. For example, the UEY Niagara Falls Project could extend data and resource sharing opportunities with the DAC, who is located in the Regional Niagara Public Health Department and therefore has access to health indicators and other valuable early years information.

Furthermore, the Project should make efforts to ***gather and analyze the reactions of relevant parties to local UEY findings.*** Interviewees emphasized the importance of ***ensuring that future research projects are developed in response to community priorities.*** They pointed out that EYNRAG, the new body that will guide and support UEY Niagara Falls, would be accountable to local parents and service providers through the decision-making structure of EYN.

Some cautions were raised in interviews about the infrastructure needed to act on a research agenda. Although several local entities, including EYNRAG, UEY, and the DAC have some responsibility for carrying out and disseminating research, ***further discussion is needed about the resources and expertise required in order to sustain an ambitious local early years research agenda.***

TABLE 5 ONGOING RESEARCH - ACTION STRATEGIES

ACTION STRATEGY	RECOMMENDED APPROACH
<p>TASK Maximize resource opportunities by extending the mandate of the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee to facilitate early years research initiatives sponsored by EYN and partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the implementation of EYN’s new governance model by becoming the Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group (EYNRAG) • Ensure that proposed terms of reference for this new group are endorsed by, and meet the needs of, the new EYN • Ensure group membership makes best use of opportunities for resource sharing while avoiding duplication of efforts (i.e. actively engage the DAC and OEYCs to maximize collaboration between the federal and provincial early years initiatives in Niagara)
<p>FUNCTION Review local UEY findings to ascertain areas where further, more in-depth research might be valuable to the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form a clear list of knowledge gaps and research priorities • Work in close partnership with organizations responsible for other important early years datasets • Where appropriate, cultivate new early years research under EYN through the creation, submission, and support of funding proposals • Ensure community priorities are guiding the research agenda • Consider the infrastructure needed to act on these ideas
<p>FUNCTION Use data driven dialogue to leverage support for ongoing research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the research carried out is discussed, interpreted, and applied by providing forums for local leaders and community members to react to local UEY research findings • Use the UEY model of evidence-based practice to advocate for early years research

Sustaining a Local Research Agenda

In order to help ensure sustainability, the newly formed EYNRAG has specified that it plans to *guide the creation and implementation of a plan to sustain EDI and community mapping research across the Niagara Region in a manner that maximizes current resources and builds on current strengths*. One of EYNRAG’s key objectives is:

- to assist EYN to ensure the best use of resources to provide coordinated early years services.

Building regular use of EDI data into the planning routines of local institutions is one way to increase the chances that this data will be gathered and applied in an ongoing way. EDI results could be used more actively than they have been to date by schools and school boards to prepare for students entering school based on their identified strengths and areas that suggest a need for improvement. The UEY Niagara Falls Project is well equipped to advocate for and support such strategies. Research results could assist other local organizations in service planning as they have with the OEYCs. Practical examples of UEY Niagara Falls EDI and CMS applications could be used to reinforce plans to sustain these research tools.

Sustaining a Local Research Agenda ~ continued

The existing UEY Niagara Falls reports, along with future reports, could be used as examples for other communities as they take on future action similar to the activities of UEY. This is particularly relevant as the 2004 Throne Speech announced that the Federal Government would be extending the UEY initiative to incorporate 100 new communities across Canada over the next three to five years. The UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee and sponsors should consider how this interest from other communities could be used as an opportunity to promote and sustain local early years research efforts.

TABLE 6 SUSTAINABILITY - ACTION STRATEGIES

ACTION STRATEGY	RECOMMENDED APPROACH
TASK/FUNCTION Contribute to the creation and implementation of an EYN plan to sustain EDI and community mapping across the Niagara Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maximize current resources and build on current strengths by collaborating with the DAC• Focus on more thorough use of data by school boards and other local organizations• Use practical examples from the UEY Niagara Falls EDI and CMS to reinforce plans to sustain these research tools

Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

The principle of evidence-based planning is central to both the UEY Initiative and the vision of the new EYN model. There should be regular evaluation of the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee as it evolves into EYNRAG. Feedback should be sought regularly on the processes and objectives of both the UEY Niagara Falls Project and the wider EYNRAG, and on success in meeting those objectives. Continual evaluation and monitoring will ensure that, under the umbrella of EYNRAG, UEY Niagara Falls is working towards the most important objectives the best way it can. As a first step, EYNRAG has specified a desire to review its terms of reference annually. This review should include specific terms of reference and objectives as they pertain to the UEY Niagara Falls Project. In addition, the Steering Committee should develop a mechanism for gathering annual feedback about the Project from key stakeholders as well as a format for gathering feedback about the effectiveness of dissemination methods.

It may also be possible to use the UEY experience to **support other local organizations in their own outcome evaluation efforts**. The UEY Niagara Falls Project has been a strong local example of the value of evidence-based planning, and it has led to the development of new research expertise in the local support-services sector. UEY data and data communication techniques may be useful models for other local organizations. EYNRAG, as a group committed to the role of research in early childhood development efforts, should continue to advocate for the importance of program evaluation throughout the service system.

TABLE 7 EVALUATION & MONITORING - ACTION STRATEGIES

ACTION STRATEGY	RECOMMENDED APPROACH
<p style="text-align: right;">TASK</p> <p>Conduct regular evaluations of the work of the UEY Niagara Falls Project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model evidence-based practice • Assess the impact of the UEY Niagara Falls Project on early years research and community development in terms of SDC (formerly HRDC), EYN, ECCDC, and community stakeholders • Implement stakeholder feedback forums for EYNRAG members and community partners
<p style="text-align: right;">TASK</p> <p>Gather regular feedback about the effectiveness of dissemination methods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that products and forums created to reach new audiences invite and facilitate feedback
<p style="text-align: right;">FUNCTION</p> <p>Support and encourage evaluation efforts of local early years organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively with the DAC to encourage linkages between program evaluation and child development outcomes identified in EDI and CMS findings, the local report card, and related early years research projects

Summarizing the Action Plan

The two tables that follow summarize the proposed tasks and functions outlined in this plan. The “Timing/Priority” column is intended to acknowledge that some action items are dependent on others being completed first, and that some items are more challenging than others.

While responsibility for these actions lies with the UEY Niagara Falls Project under the umbrella of EYNRAG, many of the concrete tasks proposed here will require additional resources. Some of these resources, presumably, will be accessed through EYNRAG’s proposal writing function. Other sources of expertise and support may also be available, and should be pursued.

TABLE 8 SUMMARY OF PROPOSED TASKS

TASKS	TIMING/PRIORITY
Extend the mandate of the UEY Niagara Falls Steering Committee to facilitate early years research initiatives sponsored by EYN and partners	3-6 months
Compile and distribute an inventory of early years related research currently being implemented across the Niagara Region	3-6 months
Tailor existing UEY Niagara Falls reports and dissemination approaches to effectively meet the needs of key audiences	6-12 months
Contribute to the development and distribution of an EYN report card on the health and well-being of children in Niagara with comparisons to Ontario	6-12 months
Contribute to the creation and implementation of an EYN plan to sustain EDI and community mapping across the Niagara Region	6-12 months
Conduct regular evaluations of the work of the UEY Niagara Falls Project	Annually
Gather regular feedback about the effectiveness of dissemination methods	Annually

TABLE 9 SUMMARY OF PROPOSED FUNCTIONS

FUNCTIONS	TIMING/PRIORITY
Assist EYNRAG to guide the dissemination of Niagara Regional EDI and community mapping data	Ongoing
Support and encourage the evaluation efforts of local early years organizations	Ongoing
Encourage key groups (i.e. parents, doctors, child care sector) to become actively involved with UEY in general, and the formation of a research agenda in particular	3-6 months
Ascertain areas where further, more in-depth research might be valuable to the community and then seek and cultivate research opportunities under EYN through the creation, submission, and support of funding proposals	6-12 months
Use data driven dialogue to leverage support for ongoing research by creating forums where local leaders can discuss and react to new research findings	6-12 months
Contribute to the creation and implementation of an EYN plan to sustain EDI and community mapping across the Niagara Region	6-12 months

In many communities across Ontario, local leaders have invested a great deal of their time and energy in efforts to develop more coordinated and evidence-based approaches to supporting families with young children. Niagara Falls and the Niagara Region have been in the vanguard of this movement. There is general agreement in the Niagara Region that the UEY Initiative has played an important role in this process.

The purpose of this action plan has been to summarize the contributions of the UEY Niagara Falls Project and to indicate ways in which the Project's story can help to identify action steps for the future. The lessons that can be taken from the UEY Niagara Falls Project cluster around a single theme:

We can't improve the health of young children, families, and the communities where they live until we take an honest and thorough look at the current situation.

We must continually gather new and useful local information about the reality of children's lives in Niagara Falls in order to develop workable ideas for the future. We must also organize, interpret, and present this information in ways that are useful and relevant to as many different people as possible.

Knowledge Transfer and Application Objectives

1. Release of research reports to provide the community with analyses on factors influencing early child development to underlie local strategies to improve children's early years
2. Effective knowledge diffusion and transfer within the community, based on data driven dialogue that supports the translation of information into knowledge through the deliberate and dynamic engagement of the community with UEY research results and materials
3. Applied dissemination - extending the job of dissemination to include provisions and supports for actual change based on community response through the development of a knowledge action plan that will ensure a greater return for UEY research and instruments in support of healthy child development as outcomes are applied both within Niagara Falls and more broadly across the Niagara Region

1. How did you become involved with the UEY Steering Committee?
2. What role does the Steering Committee play?
3. In what ways are the UEY findings affirming? In what ways are they surprising?
4. How might the UEY findings be useful to you?
5. Given the characteristics/findings for Niagara Falls, what do you think UEY could offer to improve Niagara Falls?
6. What can be done to maximize the chances that the findings will be used?
7. What would you like to see included in the action plan?

Documents Detailing the Background of UEY Niagara Falls

Background information on the UEY federal research initiative in Niagara Falls can be found in the Project proposal documents, which were based on the Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) Working Paper:

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- *Understanding the Early Years: Community Impacts on Child Development*. Connor and Brink (2003).
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These documents, as well as those listed below, can be obtained from the Early Childhood Community Development Centre.

Information related to the findings of the UEY Project for Niagara Falls can be found in the following reports:

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- *Measuring Readiness to Learn in Niagara Falls: The Early Development Instrument Findings*. Understanding the Early Years Community Research in Child Development (2001).
 - *Measuring Readiness to Learn in Niagara Falls: Results of the Community Mapping Study in Niagara Falls*. Understanding the Early Years Community Research in Child Development (2001).
 - *Understanding the Early Years: Early Childhood Development in Niagara Falls, Ontario*. KSI Research International Inc., Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada (2003).
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For further background information on early child development plans for the Niagara Region see:

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- *Strengthening Tomorrow: A Community Action Plan*, Ontario Early Years Steering Committee - Niagara (2002).
 - *Early Childhood Development and Parenting Plan*, Regional Municipality of Niagara, Community Services Department, Children's Service Division (2001).
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Draft Terms of Reference for the Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group (EYNRAG)

Mandate

The EYNRAG will provide guidance to the EYN community council and the EYN partners for research related to the enhancement of positive developmental outcomes for children in Niagara.

Objectives

1. Facilitate early years research initiatives sponsored by the EYN community council and the EYN partners.
2. Enhance collaboration and facilitate the sharing of information regarding research in Niagara relevant to the early years.
3. Ensure that early years research data is available to:
 - assist in the development of new early years programming and services;
 - assist in the development of new early years research projects; and
 - inform the development of plans to monitor the progress of children.
4. Assist the EYN community council and the EYN partners to ensure the best use of resources to provide coordinated early years services.

Membership

(To be determined)

Reporting Relationship

The EYNRAG will report to the EYN community council and the EYN partners through the EYN Coordinator.

Frequency of Meetings

The EYNRAG will meet monthly - unless otherwise necessary - at the call of the Chair.

Location of Meetings

The EYNRAG will meet at (location to be determined).

Minutes

The agenda and minutes are to be prepared by (to be appointed) and distributed at least one week in advance of the next meeting. Approved minutes will be distributed to the members of both the EYN community council and the EYN partners.

Decision Making

Decisions will be made by consensus if at all possible. If consensus cannot be reached in a particular area, then recommendations put forward will reflect that consensus could not be reached in that area.

Tasks of the Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group (EYNRAG)

Tasks

1. Provide guidance on the development of an annual early years report card on the health and well being of children in Niagara with comparisons to Ontario
2. Develop a summary of early years related research currently being implemented across the Niagara Region
3. Review early years research to provide informed recommendations around future research initiatives and best practices
4. Seek and cultivate new early years research opportunities under EYN through the creation, submission, and support of funding proposals
5. Act as a steering committee (as per attached terms of reference) for the federal UEY Project and future research initiatives sanctioned by EYN (terms to be determined)
6. Guide the dissemination of Niagara Regional EDI and community mapping data to:
 - inform the development of new early years programming and services;
 - assist in the development of new early years research projects;
 - inform the development of plans for optimal investment in the early years; and
 - support the best use of resources to provide coordinated early years services
7. Guide the creation and implementation of a plan to sustain EDI and community mapping research across the Niagara Region in a manner that maximizes current resources and builds on current strengths
8. Review terms of reference on an annual basis

Deliverables

1. A dissemination plan for Niagara Regional EDI and community mapping data
2. A plan to sustain EDI and community mapping research across the Niagara Region to maximize current resources and build on current strengths
3. A summary of early years related research currently being implemented across the Niagara Region
4. An annual early years report card
5. Recommendations to EYN as to potential research projects and opportunities

