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*Quality of Life
Begins with Quality*

Child Care



Quality child care does more than prepare children for success in school and in life--it's part of the family lifestyle.



The Standard Review
THE TRIBUNE

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Niagara included in study of children's readiness to learn

Children's experiences before the age of five have a profound impact on their success when they start school. The skills they've acquired, their ability to socialize with other children, and their confidence when trying new things are all part of children's readiness to learn. Understanding the Early Years, or UEY, is a federally funded research project that helps Canadian communities better understand how ready their children are to learn when they enter grade one and what can be done at a community level to enhance this readiness. The research began more than five years ago in just a dozen cities across the country, including Niagara Falls. It has since been conducted in many more Canadian communities, and, as was announced at a special community forum Feb. 21, will be taking place throughout Niagara for three more years.

Through community level research and mapping, the UEY project will provide high-quality data on children's readiness to learn and on the family and community factors that influence children's development. This information will then become the basis for action plans that respond to children's documented learning needs. Glory Ressler coordinates the UEY research for both Niagara Falls and the Niagara Region as a whole.

"Understanding how young children in a given community are doing and the factors that might be affecting them really takes three different streams of research," explains Ressler. "The first involves an objective assessment of children's progress in terms of five areas of development. (See chart.) For this, we ask all of Niagara's senior kindergarten teachers to observe the children in their class, and to complete an Early Development Instrument questionnaire for each one. This information is then tabulated by McMaster University—individual children are never singled out or identified. The second stream of research involves gathering information from families about how their children are developing and how well their community is supporting their children's development. The third stream of research involves gathering and examining information about factors that are commonly believed to play a significant role in children's overall health and ability to learn. Programs and services available to families such as libraries and recreation facilities are

inventoried and other information is collected—for instance, how often people move, unemployment rates, family status, average household incomes and average education levels."

"When we put all of this data together, it offers communities a kind of baseline measurement of how children are doing, so they can set goals and keep measuring their progress toward them. This makes it possible for parents, school boards, city officials and others to use research and evidence as a basis for decision-making related to children's learning and development," says Ressler. "Sometimes relatively small changes can make a big difference in the quality of learning that takes place among the children." In one UEY community, for instance, a school breakfast program was initiated, which helped to address a community-wide issue related to children's physical development and ability to pay attention in class.

The UEY research work is sponsored by the ECCDC, with insight and advice offered by the Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group. Ressler shares the UEY findings through presentations to parents groups, service clubs, and church and community organizations. "One of the great things about the federal UEY project is that it encourages coordinators like myself to make our findings public and to help neighbourhoods and communities develop plans for enhancing children's early years experiences. It's based on the idea that knowledge is power—that once people understand what's needed—they'll work together to make positive changes."

If you'd like to learn more about the UEY research, or wish to arrange a presentation, please contact Glory Ressler at 905-646-7311, ext. 319, or email gressler@eccdc.org.

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