



Understanding the Early Years Niagara Region
ACTION PLAN (2008)

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eccdc

early childhood community development centre

Understanding the Early Years

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this action plan are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Human Resources and Social Development Canada or of the Federal Government. All computations presented here were prepared by the author(s).

The views and opinions of originators expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the ECCDC or any associate or partner thereof.

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Introduction

This report outlines suggested future actions from the perspective of the community development work undertaken by, and findings arising from, the Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Niagara Region project. The recommendations are aimed at sustaining the community's capacity to use knowledge to improve outcomes for children 0-6 years.

The document is intended for two key audiences: the project funder, Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), and community partners (project sponsor, community coalition, advisory group, local committees, and service providers) and is based on:

1. local knowledge generated from the 2006 Early Development Instrument (EDI), 2007 Parent Interviews and Direct Assessment of Children Survey (PIDACS), 2006/07 Community Resource Inventory (CRI) and the 2001 Census (Statistics Canada),
2. feedback gathered at community presentations, forums and planning meetings,
3. insights arising out of dialogue on other local data and community programs/services,
4. work undertaken by UEY staff on local committees, and
5. responses to the project evaluation surveys (36 total).

This plan was also developed with a view to supporting the local Best Start Network's vision of Niagara: *a community that ensures every child will reach optimal potential through cooperative investment in the early years*. Therefore, careful consideration was given to the main goal and strategic directions of the 2007-2008 Integrated Community Plan¹, as well as the current work and plans of the various Early Years Niagara Planning Council Committees².

Finally, the Niagara Children's Charter of Rights (www.earlyyearsniagara.org/8EFF3B1DA6CD4F8FABB85E2F9B15A7A9.htm) has been widely endorsed among early learning and care service providers, planners, and local government. It represents both a commitment to, and framework for, realizing the local vision and tracking how well the community is meeting its promise to our youngest members. Therefore, community plans to report on rights-based indicators in the near future were also considered in the development of this Plan and UEY Niagara Region supported the Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group in their identification and organization of these indicators.

¹Goal and Strategic Directions from the 2007-2008 Integrated Plan (www.earlyyearsniagara.org/923BF17D183E456D8447B71E0ED0BC84.htm): To offer comprehensive, flexible, integrated and seamless quality services for children and parents at familiar neighbourhood locations, with a particular focus on strategic and informed community responses that assist in: reducing child poverty; increasing early identification and reducing wait times; improving access to programs/services, and; optimizing community development through effective, efficient, inclusive and meaningful communications and linkages.

²As outlined in the 2008/2009 Best Start Integration Status Update

Background

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a national initiative, funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), that enables communities to better understand the needs of their young children and families so they can determine the best programs and services to meet those needs. For more information, visit www.hrsdc.gc.ca.

The UEY Niagara Region project began in the fall of 2005 and ended on August 29, 2008. During that time, information on children’s development and readiness to learn in school, as well as community resources, socioeconomic conditions, and family background and functioning was gathered and shared with the community.

Over fifty (50) communication products were produced and distributed. These can be found on the following pages of the UEY Niagara Region website at www.uey.eccdc.org:

Community Reports	www.uey.eccdc.org/reports.php
Communiqués	www.uey.eccdc.org/communiqués.php
Community Development	www.uey.eccdc.org/overview.php

Nearly forty (40) presentations, forums, and/or planning meetings were held. More information on these can be found on the following pages of UEY’s website:

Presentations	www.uey.eccdc.org/presentations.php
Community Development	www.uey.eccdc.org/overview.php

The community has used the materials and knowledge generated by the project in the following ways:

- **Program and service delivery development** (i.e. Speech Services Niagara; Ontario Early Years Centres of Niagara Region; Regional Municipality of Niagara’s Community Services, Children’s Services, and Public Health Departments; school boards)
- **Community and financial planning** (i.e. City of Welland; United Way of South Niagara; Town of Fort Erie; local libraries; Regional Municipality of Niagara)

Background

- **Reporting** (i.e. Niagara Best Start Network’s “2007-2008 Integrated Community Plan”; Ontario Early Years Centres of Niagara’s “Work Plan for 2008-2009”; Regional Municipality of Niagara’s Public Health, Community Services, and Children’s Services reports “Update on Poverty Report “A Legacy of Poverty? Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region” and “Health of Niagara’s Children and Youth: Birth to 8 Years”; and the JKSK 2010 Collaborative’s “Report on Full Day Early Learning and Care)
- **Proposal writing** (Battlefield Elementary School; District School Board of Niagara; Young Carers Initiative of Niagara/YCIN)
- **Professional development** (Niagara College’s Early Childhood Education department; Brock University’s MedPlus Service Learning Program; ECCDC and its members and training attendees; Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario; Human Resources and Social Development Canada)
- **Community mobilization** (i.e. Trinity United Church – Beamsville; Niagara Falls Community Health Centre Steering Committee; Early Years Niagara Planning Council’s School Readiness and Research Advisory Committees)
- **Partnering on research and events** (i.e. Niagara Child Care Sector’s report on their 2008 Licensed Child care Survey; Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group’s Community Report Committee; Brock’s H-Beat Study; Niagara Parenting Conference; Home Child Care Open House; Literacy Link; Regional French Language Network)

Important Local Findings & Community Insights

The following highlights are from the knowledge generated by, and feedback provided to, the UEY Niagara Region project. They are not intended to be taken as statements on causes of challenges or strengths found or the impact of local programs or services, nor are they meant to be interpreted conclusively. Rather, it is hoped that the information will spark further discussion and examination of community conditions, programs and services, and early learning and development results in order to continue to plan for improved outcomes, monitor results, and deliver integrated, accessible, and quality programs and services. The complete reports, which include more

comprehensive charted and mapped data at the regional and municipal/neighbourhood levels, can be found on the Community Reports pages of the UEY website (www.uey.eccdc.org/reports.php).

Consider the following as signposts to those geographic, early development, and/or early learning and care program/service delivery areas where further consultation with community stakeholders and additional monitoring of local results, trends, and conditions may be of use to local planners, decision-makers, and service providers.

Overall as a Region, Niagara showed relatively good:

- Socioeconomic conditions (2001 Census, Statistics Canada)
- Number and location of community resources (2007 CRI, UEY)
- Parent responses regarding child development and early experiences, family circumstances and programs and services in the community (2007 PIDACS, HRSDC/Malatest/UEY)
- Readiness to learn in school results, in terms of mean scores and percentage on track for learning (2006 EDI, UEY)

At the same time:

- Almost one out of four senior kindergarten children in Niagara are not on track for learning in school
- There are varying results across the region and within municipalities, with regard to socioeconomic conditions and EDI scores
- The following are the neighbourhoods that showed above regional vulnerability averages across all five domains of the EDI:
 - Thorold Proper in Thorold (also weak scores on 17/20 sub-domains)
 - Rural Welland/Cooks Mills & Ontario Rd./Dain City in Welland
 - Elgin in Niagara Falls
 - Queenston & Downtown in St. Catharines
- There are pockets of vulnerability on overall EDI, and also by domains, within areas of the region that have large sample sizes.

Important Local Findings & Community Insights

Municipalities of note include:	
St. Catharines	31.9% vulnerable out of 910 children
Niagara Falls	27.4% vulnerable out of 634 children
Welland	33.3% vulnerable out of 318 children
Lincoln	30.7% vulnerable out of 260 children
Fort Erie	33.9% vulnerable out of 210 children

Neighbourhoods of note, in terms of vulnerability and sample sizes include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stamford, Drummond/Victoria & Beaverdams in Niagara Falls • Campden/Tintern & North Beamsville/Vineland/Jordan in Lincoln • Merritton in St. Catharines 	

- There appear to be declining mean scores on the Communication Skills & General Knowledge and Physical Health & Well-being domains, as well as weaknesses at the sub-domain levels in these areas
- There appears to be a relationship between demographics (gender and ESL) and socioeconomic conditions and results on the EDI
- There are also some surprising EDI results given generally good municipal socioeconomic conditions (although pockets of poor conditions are found in all three) in:

Niagara-on-the-Lake	Relatively high rates of vulnerability in overall EDI and Social Competence, Language and Cognitive Development, and Emotional Maturity domains and poor scores on 10/20 EDI sub-domains but low sample number (78 total)
Lincoln	High rates of vulnerability in overall EDI and all domains except Communication Skills and General Knowledge
Pelham	High rates of vulnerability in overall EDI and Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development, and Physical Health and Well-being domains

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- There are three (3) neighbourhoods that appear to be doing well despite poor socioeconomic conditions:

Ridgeway in Fort Erie	Available resources but other neighbourhoods in Town appear to have more
Westlane in Niagara Falls	Available resources but other neighbourhoods in City appear to have more
Eastdale & Market Square in Welland	Concentration of resources

- There appears to be a good level of available community resources generally in the Region, although not evenly distributed which is expected given the varying rural and urban nature of Niagara, and there are more sports and recreation and special interest (faith-based) resources than arts, entertainment & multicultural and social type resources
- Community resource information may not be current and does not address accessibility, use, or impact of community resources
- Thorold Proper neighbourhood had poor socioeconomic conditions and the second highest vulnerability of all 50 neighbourhoods; however, it also appears to have many resources. Are there barriers to accessing these?
- There appears to be surprising variance within neighbourhoods which may be linked to resources in:
 - Sugarloaf neighbourhood in Port Colborne which displayed one (1) high and four (4) low domain vulnerability rates (i.e. 0% vulnerability in Language & Cognitive Development and 24.3% vulnerability in Communication Skills & General Knowledge), and
 - Fairview Neighbourhood in St. Catharines which displayed one (1) high and four (4) low domain vulnerability rates (i.e. 0% vulnerability in Social Competence & Emotional Maturity and 19.1% in Communication Skills & General Knowledge).
- PIDACS results shows that the prominent barriers to participation in programs and resources were similar to those of other UEY PIDACS communities in 2006-07, including:
 - not being able to find programs available at a convenient time (49%),

Important Local Findings & Community Insights

- not having the time to participate (45%),
 - the unavailability of programs for children this age (38%),
 - programs were too costly (36%), and
 - parents were unaware that the resource existed (35%).
- Niagara children spent more time playing organized and unorganized sports than the national PIDACS cohort; however, these sports participation percentages are relatively low among both groups and our children spent statistically significantly more time watching TV or Video (1.9 hours/day) than found in the national sample (1.6 hours/day).
 - Families generally made good use of local educational and recreational resources but the children in our community tended to visit plays and musical performances and museums and art galleries less frequently than other Canadian children this age.
 - 40% of the families in the Niagara Region PIDACS sample cared for their children at home without any other type of arrangement and about 45% used two or more different types of arrangements.

“UEY Niagara Region has (had) great importance in developing deeper understanding of the social and economic development of children in the Niagara region leading educators to find answers to the “why” questions about what we experience with children in the school population.”

~ Coalition, Advisory and Key Partner
Evaluation Survey (UEY, 2008)

Community insights from UEY consultations, presentations, surveys, forums, and planning meetings included:

- local sharing and use of data should continue at the same level (minimum),
- EDI data should be considered in relation to actual numbers in sampled area, gender, and age, particularly when planning for program/service delivery,
- UEY knowledge should be used in conjunction with other data and results should be as comparable as possible so they can be monitored over time and a variety of measures compared,
- Increased local understanding of the relationship between municipal and neighbourhood socioeconomic conditions and early learning and development results, particularly with regard to reducing poverty and improving readiness to learn in school and early developmental health is needed

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- more information on numbers accessing early years community resources and outcomes, especially in relation to service delivery and program planning and EDI results, is needed,
- increased community engagement and consultation would be beneficial, especially with parents and grassroots organizations and/or in areas where there are surprising results,
- local results, along with needs/gaps in planning and service delivery, should continue to be shared in order to spark dialogue, information sharing, and idea generation in community,
- a mechanism and/or staff position where stakeholders can request information, presentations, planning support, or consultation on interpretation of results would be very beneficial,
- an annual update of the Niagara Region Early Years Research Inventory (www.uey.eccdc.org/PDF.php/NR_Research_Inventory_2007_08.pdf) would help stakeholders know what data is available and where, as well as to identify gaps and opportunities,
- linking EDI and community resource information to knowledge on specialized developmental service needs and other related data (i.e. early screening and identification, children's mental health) may assist with increasing early identification and reducing wait times,
- EDI data needs to be more closely correlated with early literacy measures and program planning activities,
- there is a need for more information on the Francophone and Aboriginal populations in Niagara and their developmental and learning needs,
- there is a need to educate stakeholders on Children's Rights and to continue collecting and disseminating rights-based data, utilizing rights-based social indicators, along with an opportunity to link with the United Nations initiative,
- there will be an ongoing need to engage the community in evidence-based planning as Full Day Early Learning and Care is implemented in Ontario, and
- local partners, community leaders, and politicians need to continue to be informed of important results so they can identify, develop, deliver, support, and resource quality early learning and care programs, services, and resources.

"This research has generated great interest in the community and has helped be a catalyst in mobilizing local decision makers to take action and use the data."

~ Coalition, Advisory and Key Partner Evaluation Survey (UEY, 2008)

Suggested Action Plan

ACTION	PARTNERS INVOLVED
<p>1. Use current and anticipated EDI and socioeconomic data to identify high priority neighbourhoods and developmental areas when planning for program/service delivery, giving careful consideration to results in relation to actual numbers as well as age and gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ontario Early Years Niagara Region Data Analysis Coordinator (OEYNR DAC) and local centres • Niagara Best Start Network, Early Years Niagara Planning Council (EYNPC) and its Full Day Early Learning, Hub Development and Research Advisory Group (EYNRAG) Committees • Niagara Region Community Services and Public Health Departments • Speech Services Niagara • School Boards
<p>2. Gather additional information with regard to surprising results from the UEY Niagara Region project, as outlined in highlights above (i.e. municipalities and neighbourhoods, EDI domains over time) through community consultations and knowledge sharing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ontario Early Years Niagara Region Data Analysis Coordinator (OEYNR DAC) and local centres • Niagara Best Start Network, EYNPC and its Full Day Early Learning, Hub Development and EYNRAG Committees • Niagara Region Community Services and Public Health Departments • Speech Services Niagara • School Boards

ACTION	PARTNERS INVOLVED
<p>3. Monitor results and watch for trends over time, using comparable measures and analysis and geographic areas, and relating to other local knowledge whenever possible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OEYNR DAC • Niagara Region Community Services and Public Health Departments • School Boards • EYNPC and EYNRAG, as well as other interested Committees
<p>4. Continue to look for ways to compare and relate Children’s Rights social indicators, special needs information, QCCN results, and EQAO scores to EDI and other local early learning and development data, including information on the Francophone and Aboriginal Populations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYNPC’s Children’s Rights Interest Group, Research Advisory, and Coordination of Education and Screening for the purposes of Early Identification (COESEI) Committees • QCCN Advisory Group • School Boards • Niagara Peninsula Children’s Centre • Niagara Child & Youth Services • Family & Children’s Services Niagara • Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara • Niagara Aboriginal Children’s Planning Council • Niagara Best Start Network Francophone Advisory Committee

Suggested Action Plan

ACTION	PARTNERS INVOLVED
<p>5. Set tangible objectives, based on further examination of research findings and community consultations, and include these in the various and/or integrated community, grassroots, service delivery, and program plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYNPC and EYNRAG • All partners to aim at integrating objectives with organizational and community plans and/or developing related objectives
<p>6. Identify key areas of focus for early years research in Niagara and a strategy and mechanism for regular knowledge dissemination and ongoing support related to data interpretation and use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYNPC • EYNRAG • Niagara Region Community Services and Public Health Departments
<p>7. Develop a proposal for a data translation, dissemination, and planning support position for endorsement by EYNPC and possible submission to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYNRAG • EYNPC and MCYS for support
<p>8. Continue to increase community engagement and knowledge (i.e. with parents, policy makers, and service providers) and build additional professional capacity for ongoing data collection and use in Niagara early learning and care community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYNPC and its Early Learning and Parenting, Full Day Early Learning, Family Literacy Event Planning, Research Advisory Group, and School Readiness Committees • Libraries • School Boards • ECCDC

Conclusion

It is hoped that the information and suggestions in this Action Plan will encourage early learning and care stakeholders in Niagara to:

1. identify key early years research focus areas and implement a strategy for sustaining and building on knowledge and progress realized to-date,
2. champion for an intentional strategy to engage the community in dialogue around findings,
3. consider the Understanding the Early Years generated knowledge and Action Plan, along with other local information, when making programming and service delivery decisions, and
4. advocate for a coordinated, comprehensive, and responsive early years and EDI strategy at the provincial level, and the local resources required for its implementation.

It has been a pleasure working with all individuals, groups and organizations involved in providing programs and services for children 0-6 in Niagara!

Glory & Tiffany

