

# Early Childhood Development Coalition

Supporting our Children, Building our Future

## **Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition Phase I Report April 1, 2012-June 15, 2012**

**Prepared by Patricia Allan-Clark  
Phase I Project Coordinator**

## **Acknowledgements**

The Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition would like to thank the Economic and Social Inclusion Council (ESIC) and the Department of Social Development's Communities Raising Children Program for providing funding for this research project. We are also grateful for the partnership between Vibrant Communities Saint John and the Coalition which made this project possible. Our thanks to all the service providers, community partners, and especially the parents and caregivers who participated in interviews and focus groups, and to the members of the Coalition and project steering committee who volunteered their time to review and contribute to this report. We would also like to recognize the hard work of Patricia Allan-Clark, the Phase I Project Coordinator.

Silvia Borsic  
Anne M Murphy, MD, FRCP(C)  
Co-Chairs  
Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction .....	6
Methodology.....	9
Results.....	12
Conclusion/Next Steps.....	25
Recommendations concerning specific programs & activities to consider implementing in Phase II .....	26
Recommendations on how to ensure ongoing parent and community involvement in early childhood development activities and programs .....	27
Appendices.....	28
Appendix I: ECDC Background Document.....	28
Appendix II: List of Research Participants.....	30
Appendix III: Copies of Survey Questionnaires.....	32
Family Interview.....	32
Community Partner Interview .....	33
Service Provider Interview .....	34
Appendix IV: List of Research Documents and Websites .....	36
Appendix V: Success stories/quotes from the participants.....	39
The Early Learning Centre at Saint John the Baptist King Edward School .....	39
The ‘Polka Dot Room’ at Hazen-White Saint Francis School .....	39
Family Resource Centre Outreach Play Groups in the Lower West Side and Crescent Valley .....	40
Appendix VI: Community momentum .....	41
Community Schools .....	41
Early Childhood Development Coalition.....	41
Appendix VII: Financial Report.....	43

## Executive Summary

Established in 2002, the Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition is a collaboration of individuals from the business, government and community sectors who are committed to working collaboratively to strengthen the capacity of the Saint John community to support families with children who are from 0-5 years of age.

Members of the SJECD understand how critical the experiences of the earliest years of life are to healthy childhood outcomes and success in adulthood. They also know that for every dollar invested in quality early childhood education, the return on investment is significant and carries long term social and economic benefits for individuals, families and communities

The Understanding the Early Years (UEY) study for Saint John, completed by the Early Childhood Development Coalition in 2008, showed that there were definite gaps in performance and school readiness in the designated priority neighbourhoods.

A number of the issues identified in the UEY community action plan persist. However, in the years since the UEY Study, there have also been some very positive developments

The purpose of this 11-week research project was essentially to 'bring things up to date', and by consulting with service providers, community partners, and especially the parents and caregivers of 0-5 year olds, to determine the next steps for early childhood development in Saint John's priority neighbourhoods. By combining funding from ESIC and the Communities Raising Children (CRC) Program<sup>1</sup> it was a natural 'fit' to focus some attention on the specific question of how to continue engaging families and community members in the ongoing process of developing opportunities for Saint John's youngest citizens and their families in the priority neighbourhoods.

With the support of a five person steering committee, the researcher identified the key information to be obtained. Three separate questionnaires were developed for families, community partners and service providers. It was determined that the most effective way to gather the needed information would be through document and web research and interviews with key community partners and service providers. To gather information from parents, focus groups would be organized with the assistance of a trusted community partner or, as an alternative, the researcher would 'sit in' on already scheduled play groups.

A total of 220 people participated in the research, representing non-profit organizations, government departments, schools, the business sector and citizens from the priority neighbourhoods.

The research uncovered a number of common themes and concerns, as well as an underlying support among all participants for early childhood initiatives and learning. We were able to identify a number of strengths and challenges, as well as some programs and activities to consider implementing in each priority neighbourhood.

While this research was being carried out, the members of the ECDC Steering Committee prepared a proposal for the Economic and Social Inclusion Council concerning Phase II of this initiative.

---

<sup>1</sup> NB Department of Social Development.

Phase II (July 2012 to March 2013) would be focused on engaging priority families within the integrated Early Learning delivery model of the Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition, and see the implementation of a number of core programs in the priority neighbourhoods.

The facts are in. Investing in the early years helps children succeed in learning and access better employment opportunities as adults. The Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition is engaging the local community in providing all Saint John's citizens the best possible start in life.

## Introduction

*“In New Brunswick, 59 per cent of the population is functionally illiterate, which means the majority of the population can read at a basic level and get by, but they couldn’t comprehend a newspaper. You can’t be successful if that percentage of your people aren’t going to reach their full potential,” McCain says, “Investing in our people has to be one of the most important things we can do. We cannot have a successful economy; we cannot have a successful society, if 59 per cent of our people are functionally illiterate. So it’s hugely important to start investing in children at an early age when the building blocks for their learning potential are set in place.”*

Excerpt from interview with Margaret McCain in [Our Children Our Future](#); Telegraph Journal; July 3, 2010.

The Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition (SJECD) was formed in March of 2002 with the following vision:

***For the benefit of children and families, stakeholders together will collaborate on key issues and strategies to develop, promote and celebrate quality early childhood education and development in Greater Saint John, accessible to all.***

The SJECD is a collaboration of individuals from the business, government and community sectors who are committed to working collaboratively to strengthen the capacity of the Saint John community to support families with children who are from 0-5 years of age.

Members of the SJECD understand how critical the experiences of the earliest years of life are to healthy childhood outcomes and success in adulthood. They also know that for every dollar invested in quality early childhood education, the return on investment is significant and carries long term social and economic benefits for individuals, families and communities.

Science has shown the most significant learning and growth occur from birth to early years before a child ever reaches the classroom. It is during these first years the human brain experiences the most significant growth, development and learning. This sets the stage for how an individual functions cognitively for the remainder of their life.<sup>2</sup> One of the clearest and most direct ways of describing this came from a kindergarten student who participated in the [Roots of Empathy](#) program at Saint Patrick’s School in Saint John’s Lower West Side: “Grammy”, he said, “I learned at school today that I have a very important job to do. We have to grow our baby’s brain by reading to it and singing to it. It’s very, very important, and we all have to do this all the time, or it won’t grow.”<sup>3</sup>

Many studies have shown that the return on investment in early childhood development and the impact it has on success in education and employment later on in life, are significant. Some of the most recent Canadian data indicates that for every dollar invested in early childhood education, the return is at least

---

<sup>2</sup> [An Early Years Focus for Future Prosperity in Saint John. The 2012-2016 Saint John Early Learning Centre Sustainability Plan.](#) Saint John Early Learning Centre in collaboration with the Early Childhood Development Coalition and the YMCA of Saint John. December 2011., p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> As reported by Jill Roberts, Public Health Nurse. Interviewed at Marketplace Wellness Center, May 25, 2012.

\$2 in improved employment opportunities and increased tax revenues, both in the short term for parents, and for their children later on.<sup>4</sup> As one research participant told us: “*The government will get its money back from us in taxes, if we can work because we have child care.*”<sup>5</sup> Children who attend preschool also tend to have improved school readiness, higher graduation levels and future earnings.<sup>6</sup> In fact, early childhood development is also economic development and community development.

Gaps emerge early in life between children raised in poor communities and those that start out with more books and language in their home and family life.

In Saint John, there are five neighbourhoods with a high concentration of families living in poverty: the South End, the Old North End, Crescent Valley, Waterloo Village and the Lower West Side. They are considered ‘priority neighbourhoods’ for community development efforts, both by the City and community partners.

The Understanding the Early Years (UEY) study for Saint John, completed by the Early Childhood Development Coalition in 2008<sup>7</sup>, showed that there were definite gaps in performance and school readiness in the designated priority neighbourhoods. The UEY Community Action Plan identified a number of key issues and priorities related to early childhood care and development.

A number of the issues identified in the community action plan persist. However, in the years since the UEY Study, there have also been some very positive developments. In 2009, the child poverty rate in Saint John (CMA) — based on the pre-tax Low Income Measure (LIM), an indicator of relative poverty — was **23.6%**, down from 23.9% in 2008 and 27.5% in 2000. The 2009 figure was lower than the provincial average (24.5%), but still higher than the national rate (23.2%). (*Statistics Canada*). In 2009, the overall poverty rate in Saint John (CMA), based on pre-tax LIM, was **20.6%**, down from 21.9% in 2008 and 23.3% in 2000. The 2009 figure was lower than the provincial average (22.2%) as well as the national rate (21.5%). (*Statistics Canada*).<sup>8</sup>

In November 2009, New Brunswick adopted a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan set a target of reducing income poverty by 25% and deep income poverty by 50% by the year 2015. The *Economic and Social Inclusion Act* (April 2010) set these targets in law, and established the Economic and Social Inclusion Council (ESIC). In 2011, Vibrant Communities Saint John was officially recognized as the local Community Inclusion Network (CIN) responsible for coordinating poverty reduction efforts in the region.

There have been important developments on the early childhood policy front as well. In June 2008, the New Brunswick Government launched a 10-year strategy for early childhood entitled Be Ready for Success. It included implementing a framework for early childhood education and school readiness. 2009 saw the establishment of nine pilot early childhood development centres across the province, including one in Saint John. A number of early childhood initiatives, formerly under the departments of Social Development and Health, were integrated into the Department of Education to form the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2011. In June 2012, the New Brunswick

---

<sup>4</sup> Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action. Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain, J. Fraser Mustard, Kerry McCuaig. 2011 <http://earlyyearsstudy.ca/en/> p. 67

<sup>5</sup> Participant in focus group held at Prince Charles School, May 25, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Early Years Study 3 page 67.

<sup>7</sup> Although the study was published in 2008, it reflects information gathered on children in 2005-7.

<sup>8</sup> Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Greater Saint John’s Vital Signs<sup>c</sup> 2011. Our Region’s 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Checkup. October, 2011.

government issued Putting Children First: Positioning Children for the Future, which further reinforced the link between early childhood care and development and education, and outlined some major financial investments in this field over the next three years. Although still very much ‘a work in progress’, these policies can definitely be seen as innovative when compared to other English-speaking provinces in Canada, and reflect best practice thinking internationally that supports building a seamless continuum from early childhood through to education and beyond.

The success stories in Appendix V show that, by working together, strong community partners have been able to create some excellent learning and development opportunities for families with very young children in Saint John. This is, in fact, typical of our community, where the Human Development Council, Vibrant Communities and the Business Community Anti- Poverty Initiative (BCAPI), have been leaders in poverty reduction efforts in the province for several years.

The purpose of this 11-week research project was essentially to ‘bring things up to date’, and by consulting with service providers, community partners, and especially the parents and caregivers of 0-5 year olds, to determine the next steps for early childhood development in Saint John’s priority neighbourhoods. By combining funding from ESIC and the Communities Raising Children (CRC) Program<sup>9</sup> it was a natural ‘fit’ to focus some attention on the specific question of how to continue engaging families and community members in the ongoing process of developing opportunities for Saint John’s youngest citizens and their families in the priority neighbourhoods.

This document describes the methodology used and our research findings. It presents a number of recommendations for programs that could be implemented in each priority neighbourhood, and for building ongoing parent engagement in the development of future programs.

It concludes with suggestions for a transition to Phase II of this work, as presented in the proposal submitted by the ECDC to the Economic and Social Council (ESIC) on June 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.

---

<sup>9</sup> NB Department of Social Development.

## Methodology

The overall goal of the project was to prepare the foundations to improve early childhood opportunities for families with young children (ages 0-5 years) that live in priority neighbourhoods in Saint John.

Using a community development approach involving parents, early childhood service providers, neighbourhood leaders, schools (as it pertains to getting children ready for school) and other community partners, we were to:

- Gather information about existing quality early childhood development initiatives currently accessible to families with young children living in the priority neighbourhoods<sup>10</sup>;
- Determine the supports that families with young children need in order to assist their children to thrive;
- Recommend the most effective, efficient and accessible ways to provide the required early childhood family supports.

In addition, we were to:

- Inform all relevant early childhood organizations about the existence of the Saint John Early Childhood Coalition (SJECCDC) and invite them to become involved.
- Inform all relevant early childhood organizations about the past work/accomplishments of the ECDC and ask for input into the future initiatives of the ECDC.
- Inform relevant early childhood organizations/individuals that the ECDC plans to develop a parent input process for the ECDC, and ask for their input regarding what this process should look like, taking into consideration the need for transportation and childcare support; the need for a well thought out conflict resolution process that will ensure confidentiality and a healthy environment; the need for the process to be cost effective; etc.
- Develop recommendations for a best practice parent input process that could be implemented in Phase II.

The first step was to identify the key research questions:

<b>ESIC Phase I Key Research Topics</b>	
From Community Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated information on programs, costs, contact info. etc. (from parents' handbook/HDC on-line database)</li> <li>• Successes – what is working well, programs that are growing, what are parents and children responding to well, etc?</li> <li>• Challenges – where struggling/could do better – as an organization, what you see parents struggling with in the neighbourhood</li> <li>• If additional funding was available for early childhood development activities– what would you do? (Unmet needs, next steps, expansion of certain programs....)</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this study, we also included Saint John's East Side. In recent years, a number of residents there have come together as 'The East Side Motivators'. In certain areas of this neighbourhood (e.g., Reading Crescent) there are a significant number of single-parent families. There are other areas (e.g. Glen Falls) with a large number of young, two working-parent families with modest incomes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What evaluations, statistics, reports do you have available?</li> <li>• What kind of mechanisms do you have for parent input? What seems to work best for consulting with parents/getting their feedback and ideas?</li> <li>• Updated information on childcare/daycare centres in neighbourhood</li> <li>• Information about ECDC and Phase II of ESIC project</li> </ul>
From Early Childhood Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What programs do you participate in?</li> <li>• What has been helpful? What do you/your kids enjoy?</li> <li>• What kind of changes have you seen in your children? In yourself?</li> <li>• What has been difficult (for participating in/getting linked up with the services you need)</li> <li>• What else would you like to see for young children in the neighbourhood? That would help you as a parent of young children?</li> </ul>
Others: Other Locations in NB/Canada Funders Family Resource Centres in other locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practices re: holistic/integrated approach/linking early childhood development to education?</li> <li>• Innovation – new programs, new partnerships</li> <li>• Parent forums – moving from “clients” to “participants”</li> <li>• Community development approach – empowering communities to design their early childhood development programs &amp; services</li> </ul>

Given the extremely short timeframe, it was determined that the most efficient and effective way to carry out the research would be:

- Reading and internet research focusing on the latest findings and best practices in early childhood development
- Interviews with service providers and community partners and families in the priority neighbourhoods. The target was to reach all ECDC members, relevant community schools, and neighbourhood leaders.
- Focus Groups with parents and caregivers; where possible set up with a well-trusted community partner. The target was to have at least one focus group in each neighbourhood.
- Another option for getting input from families and other neighbourhood residents was to ‘sit in’ on scheduled play-groups or meetings.

Our approach was to “piggy back” as much as possible on already-existing activities, networks, tools and gathering places - especially when they were already familiar to young families. In order to gather as much information as possible within the limited timeframe, we used many different means of communication, but we prioritized face-to-face contact and meeting people in the priority neighbourhoods, so we were very mobile. Participation was voluntary and confidential, and to help facilitate participation, childcare and transportation was provided where needed. We also decided to write the final report in a language that was accessible to partners and families in priority neighbourhoods, and as a very use-able document for Phase II.

Three separate questionnaires were developed for families, community partners and service providers.<sup>11</sup>

The bulk of interviews and focus groups took place between May 2<sup>nd</sup> and June 6<sup>th</sup> 2012. The average duration of the meetings was 45-60 minutes. The majority were recorded and then transcribed.

A Steering Committee made up of five ECDC members met 3 times during the project:

- On April 30<sup>th</sup>, to finalize the research tools and strategies.
- On May 15<sup>th</sup>, to receive an update on emerging themes and begin preparing the Phase II proposal.
- On June 11<sup>th</sup>, to review the first draft of the Phase I report and the overall project.

Ongoing supervision was carried out by the Executive Director of the Saint John Family Resource Centre, which served as the project coordinator's home base when not 'on the road'.

In addition, a limited amount of funds was available to actually 'pilot' some activities during Phase I. This, in fact, did take place, again despite the very limited time-frame.

- A four-week program called *A Recipe for Literacy* took place at Main Street Baptist Church in the Old North End between June 1 and 25<sup>th</sup>.
- A site was secured and a list of materials drawn up for a play group in the Glen Falls area of the East Side.
- Discussions were held with community partners in the Waterloo Village for the development of a playgroup, and a list of materials drawn-up for the play group start up.
- Two articles were written for the community newspaper *Around the Block* about the Early Learning Centre at Saint John the Baptist King Edward School (interviews with two parents) and the on the Family Resource Centre "*A Recipe for Literacy*" program
- Each participant in interviews and focus groups received a two-page description of the ECDC and its accomplishments, and was invited to consider becoming involved
- A plenary session of the ECDC members was held on June 1st to present the research findings and discuss next steps. This was followed by a lunch where discussions continued.

Between April 1 and June 15, 2012, there were a total of **220 participants** in this project, according to the following break-down by age group<sup>12</sup>:

0-5 yrs: 75  
6-18 yrs: 25  
19-65 yrs: 120  
65+: 0  
Total: 220

In addition to the one full-time staff person (Project Coordinator), a total of **38 volunteers** contributed an estimated **125 hours of volunteer time**, as steering committee members, participants in focus groups, or helping to organize these focus groups. It would not have been possible to carry out this project, or to obtain the quantity and quality of information that we did, without the contribution of these volunteers and participants.

---

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix III for copies of these questionnaires.

<sup>12</sup> A complete list of participants by sector is in Appendix II.

# Results

## Findings – Common Themes and Threads

There were some consistently recurring themes in the interviews, meetings and focus groups. We have grouped these together, although in no particular order, to assist with planning in Phase II.

### Current services for 0-5 year-olds are good, but there are not enough of them to meet the needs of the community

- Some neighbourhoods are still under-served (e.g. East Side, Old North End)
- The needs of 0-2 year olds are very different from 3-4 year olds; are we meeting those needs through once a week play groups? Older preschoolers may need more structured learning activities more often.
- Funding for parenting programs is very limited and is being cut from year-to-year. We need more resources (funding and staff) to have consistency and continuity in the parenting programs we can offer and to meet growing needs, so we don't have waiting lists and can cut down waiting times
- Services should be universal, so they are not identified as being only for "poor parents" or "bad parents"
- Activities need to take place in a space where everyone feels welcome and that allows for natural peer support across social "classes".
- There are very few activities and programs for pre-schoolers on evenings and weekends, and during the summer
- Some groups such as children with special needs and refugees are still isolated
- Programs for dads have been cut because of lack of funding

### Childcare is very expensive and the quality can vary depending on licensing

- There are very few infant spaces in Saint John; these spaces are expensive for child care providers to set up and administer.
- If a child has special needs (e.g. asthma, behaviour problems) it's difficult to find a daycare willing to accept them.
- It is hard for parents to judge the quality of daycare. Different parents have different experiences and you cannot rely on "word of mouth" or rumours to make a good choice. Some day cares will not let you visit without first putting down a deposit.
- Day care subsidies for parents on social assistance do not cover the cost of daycare and the top up fee that parents have to pay can be expensive for them ; this can further limit parents' options for child care.<sup>13</sup>
- There are few child care services available for casual or short-term needs (e.g. to go to a job interview)
- Providing child care is essential to parents attending school, meetings, training sessions, etc.

---

<sup>13</sup> Since this information was gathered, the New Brunswick government has announced its intention to increase day care subsidies for parents.

- Playgroups are a welcome alternative to day care for parents who cannot afford it, or who choose not to put their children in day care. They have the added value of parent-child interaction, parents learning new things and talking with other parents of young children.

#### Parents and service providers have difficulty accessing information on services/events

- SJ Kid website was a very useful “one-stop spot” to get all the information parents needed, including free events parents can take their children to.
- It is sometimes overwhelming to figure out where to look because information is in many different places. Programs and services are constantly changing; service providers need to find ways to communicate more regularly.
- Need to market our programs better; including between organizations

#### Specialist services are hard to access

- It is difficult and time consuming to get a proper diagnosis (eg ADHD, autism) because of long wait times, few specialists in a smaller centre like Saint John; lots of travel to/from appointments
- Schools are not able to provide the same supports as FACE<sup>14</sup>, Public Health, Stepping Stones, etc., so parents sometimes feel left on their own when a child reaches school age. The transition is not very smooth.

#### Organizations serving 0-5 year olds and their parents have a variety of approaches and philosophies. This can be confusing, even intimidating for parents, and make collaboration between service providers challenging

- Parents are concerned about being identified as “bad parents” and being reported to child protection. Need to ‘normalize’ the idea of parenting – everyone can learn; children do not come with a handbook
- The key to success is building good relationships with the family unit; working in partnership with them and a non-judgemental approach builds trust. Gaining their trust is essential.
- Continuity in staffing builds trust; this is hard to maintain when funding is year-to-year, or even month-to-month and salaries are not competitive.
- Neighbourhoods have seen many projects come and go. Parents want to see stability and a safe, non-judgemental atmosphere before committing.
- We need to build a common approach to early childhood development; work through differences in philosophy between school –based educators and Early Childhood Educators
- Expand our network to include day cares in each neighbourhood (building partnership vs. competition)

#### Transportation is a major ongoing challenge

- Transit cuts have meant changes in bus routes and fewer buses. Reduced schedules don’t always fit meeting/appointment times, but lower West side now has more regular service to Uptown
- Buses (and bus drivers) are not always child and stroller-friendly
- It is expensive if you have more than 1 child; you have to pay for 2<sup>nd</sup> child under 6.
- Not all organizations can provide parents with transportation money. These budgets are being cut, but they are essential to helping young parents get to courses, events, etc.

---

<sup>14</sup> Formerly Early Intervention Saint John.

- Safety on buses and in taxis (e.g. car seats) is still an issue
- Vibrant Communities is doing a user-survey with City transit; our municipality provides the lowest subsidy (per capita) in NB to transit commission; trying to get momentum to do more

There are few opportunities for physical activity for 0-5 year-olds

- Playgrounds do not have appropriate equipment for toddlers
- Streets are not safe for walking/playing (garbage, needles, sidewalks in disrepair); some neighbourhoods don't have sidewalks
- We are seeing a negative impact on the health of children as young as 3 years old of poor nutrition choices and lack of exercise

Having difficulty meeting basic needs is a definite stress factor on parents

- Mental health challenges of parents and children are a growing issue (isolation; anxiety; PTSD following family violence). We are seeing mental health issues in children as young as infants.
- Some parents are feeling so overwhelmed they literally "check out" and leave the parenting to community organizations and schools.

The biggest overall challenge appears to be engaging parents

- In some neighbourhoods, apart from in-home visits, we are still not reaching many parents or getting many parents out with their children. What *are* the best outreach strategies for reaching parents who are disengaged? (N.B. Will be different for each neighbourhood.)
- In general, we have to reach out to (go to) parents, rather than waiting for them to come to us

We have come a long way in building partnerships between organizations, but we can still do better

- Funding cuts will continue to move us towards "doing more with less", "working smarter, not harder" and developing programs by putting together the contributions of several organizations
- How do we establish at least one trusted relationship with each family that can be an entryway to other services and make for a better coordination of services?
- Creating a seamless conveyor belt of services from "cradle to cradle" - prenatal to preschool to kindergarten to school to employment to parenting and back to prenatal (e.g. Harlem Children's Zone)
- Can we do more cross-training? (e.g. incorporating family literacy into home visits by Public Health Nurses/FACE)
- It is time for a common confidentiality agreement that would help us share information and better serve each family
- We are at a point where we can no longer coordinate early childhood development "off the corner of our desks" if we are going to take things to the next level
- How can we use technology to be more efficient in our coordination?

NB Early Childhood and Care curriculum appears to be a positive step forward for child care providers, parents & children, but we still need to tighten up the transition to Kindergarten

- Although child care providers are doing more documentation, Kindergarten teachers don't often ask to see children's preschool binder
- We are still catching too many children at EDI (Early Development Instrument) Assessment. We need to continue efforts to reach them younger; parents and teachers are still unfamiliar with EDI;

- Some concerns around EDI testing being done by teachers that children do not know, in unfamiliar settings; may need to explore method of administering EDI
- Funding cuts may result in fewer 3.5 assessments. This would be a step backwards for identifying children at risk before they arrive at school<sup>15</sup>

The changes in government departments and programs, specifically the merger of Early Childhood with Education – with more to come - have left some parents, community partners and service providers unsure of their future roles and responsibilities

- We do not know what mergers of Districts 6, 8 and 10 will mean for the future of pre-k programs (up until now each district has had a different approach)
- Some early childhood initiatives were officially transferred to education over one year ago, but there are still many important things to work out relative to mandate and procedures
- The expanded mandate of early intervention up to 8 years old will make for more opportunities for collaboration with schools, and help children and parents with the transition to education; however the details still needs to be worked out.
- There are still some ‘grey areas’ to be worked out in mandates – e.g. who will serve 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> time moms if Public Health is focussing on first time moms and mothers at risk, and non-profit agencies are “maxed out” in terms of staff?
- Provincial funding for family resources centres, which used to be year-to-year, is now month-to-month while things are in transition

The ECDC also identified some common threads that pull together the quilt of services for 0-5 year olds and their families across the priority neighbourhoods:

- Community schools
- Home visits by Public Health and Family and Child Education<sup>16</sup>
- Churches
- Neighbourhood groups such as tenants’ associations, PULSE, West Side PACT, etc.

An important part of Phase II will be working out exactly how to best capitalize on these “connectors” between neighbourhoods in order to leverage maximum impact.

---

<sup>15</sup> As part of the latest Early Childhood announcements, the provincial government is addressing this point.

<sup>16</sup> FACE does over 3,000 visits yearly to some 168 families; Public Health nurses do intensive in-home visiting with first-time moms identified as ‘at risk’. Together, this is probably the most comprehensive outreach strategy currently in operation.

## Findings – Services and Gaps by Priority Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
<b>South End</b> 195 children 0-4 <sup>17</sup> 130 children 5-9	<p>Early Learning Centre (ELC)</p> <p>Family Resource Centre (FRC)</p> <p>PULSE (People United in the Lower South End)</p> <p>Saint John the Baptist-King Edward School</p> <p>South End Day Care</p> <p><u>Focus Group:</u> FRC Parents (10)</p>	<p><u>Saint John Baptist-King Edward School</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Learning Centre (ELC)</li> <li>• Parent drop-in</li> <li>• Bi-weekly parent coffee house/info session hosted by school &amp; ELC</li> <li>• Play groups (Mon &amp; Fri)</li> <li>• On-site appts. with speech/language, FACE, Social Development, public health. Learning Disabilities</li> </ul> <p><u>Family Resource Centre (FRC)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting sessions: Boundaries, pre-natal, Learning through Play (collab. with ELC)</li> <li>• community kitchen (collab. with Y Settlement Services)</li> <li>• parent information sessions</li> <li>• emergency diapers &amp; formula</li> <li>• Play Groups (Tu-Wed-Th)</li> </ul> <p><u>South End Community Centre (6 years +)</u></p>	<p>Collaboration between FRC &amp; ELC</p> <p>Collab. between ELC &amp; Saint John Baptist/King Edward School (easy transition to kindergarten, early parent involvement, familiarity with school environment)</p> <p>On site access to services at ELC (speech/language, social development, public health)</p> <p>Quality of programs</p> <p>High concentration of daycare spaces (relative to other neighbourhoods)</p> <p>Attendance at play groups; well-liked by parents</p>	<p>Demand for FRC parenting courses bigger than \$\$ and staff capacity (waiting lists/waiting period between classes)</p> <p>Neighbourhood safety (condition of sidewalks; garbage)</p> <p>Broken outdoor play equipment/very limited equipment for toddlers (school + Rainbow Park)</p> <p>Cost of dance/music/sports programs</p> <p>Rec. activities @ community centre are for 6 years+; inadequate supervision for pre-schoolers</p> <p>No weekend activities (esp. for fathers)</p>	<p>Secure long term ELC funding (sustainability/expansion)</p> <p>Links with PULSE/SEACATS</p> <p>Parent support group/monthly info. sessions? (activities between parenting courses; integration of new parents while on waiting list)</p> <p>Parenting info sessions at ELC</p> <p>Development of parent advisory function (training, participation in meetings; advisory council)</p> <p>More parenting programs by FRC</p>

<sup>17</sup> 2011 Census Data from Statistics Canada

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreational activities w/Boys &amp; Girls Club, YMCA, Inner City Ministry</li> <li>• Chicken Noodle Club</li> </ul> <p><u>PULSE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Garden</li> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Income Tax Clinics</li> <li>• Community Police Officer</li> </ul> <p><u>Day Care Centres:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South End Day Care (26 spaces; 2-12 yrs<sup>18</sup>)</li> <li>• Princess Daycare (17 spaces; 15 mos-12 yrs),</li> <li>• Centenary Queen Square Day Care (24 spaces; 15 mos.-7 yrs )</li> <li>• Early Learning Centre @ SJBKE (39 spaces; 2-5 yrs)</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Lower West Side</b> 185 children 0-4 125 children 5-9</p>	<p>Marketplace Wellness Centre</p> <p>Carleton Community Centre</p> <p>West Side Coop Pre</p>	<p><u>Carleton Community Centre</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRC Play group 1 day/week</li> <li>• FRC Parent info. sessions</li> <li>• FRC Community Kitchen</li> <li>• FRC Active Kids</li> <li>• Recreational programs (cheerleading, seniors exercise,</li> </ul>	<p>Neighbourhood 'hub' at Carleton Community Centre/Marketplace Wellness (nurse practitioner, play group, food bank)</p> <p>accessible outdoor</p>	<p>No summer recreational activities for under 6 years old</p> <p>FRC Play group participation numbers have grown beyond capacity of 1 staff</p>	<p>2<sup>ND</sup> Day FRC Play group? (additional staffing)</p> <p>Learning activities on food bank days while parents wait in line?</p> <p>Contact neighbourhood churches</p> <p>Link up with West Side PACT</p>

<sup>18</sup> Information from Daycares/Kindergartens/Nurseries list updated by Department of Social Development, May 3, 2012

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
<b>Lower West Side, c'td</b>	School  St. Patrick's School  <u>Focus Group:</u> FRC Play Group Parents (15)	<u>Marketplace Wellness Centre</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vaccinations</li> <li>• specimen collection</li> <li>• nurse visits</li> <li>• Social Development rep. on site</li> <li>• Food Bank</li> <li>• Food Purchasing Club</li> </ul> <u>Saint Patrick School</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten readiness</li> <li>• Roots of Empathy (Kindergarten)</li> <li>• Reading mentors</li> </ul> <u>Day Care Centres:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Side Co-op Preschool (40 spaces;18 mths-5 yrs)</li> <li>• West Saint John YM-YWCA Child Care Centre (60 spaces; 2-12 yrs)</li> <li>• Angels 'R' Wee (52 spaces;birth-12 years)</li> <li>• Lil Imagination Station Daycare (45 spaces; birth-12 yrs.)</li> </ul>	playground equipment at Carleton Community Centre  Improved bus access uptown  Attendance at weekly play group (20+);parent involvement in parenting session		
<b>Crescent Valley</b> 125 children 0-4 110 children 5-9	Crescent Valley Resource Centre	<u>Crescent Valley Resource Centre:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurse practitioner 1/week</li> <li>• Youth Program</li> </ul>	2 community facilities: CVTA & CVRC  Active youth program	Low attendance at weekly play group  2012-13 funding for pre-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of FRC playgroup @ CVRC</li> <li>• Invite Anglin Drive parents to join FRC Crescent Valley Play Group</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Look at other options for diversifying</li> </ul>

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
Crescent Valley	<p>Hazen White – Saint Francis School</p> <p>Quality Learning NB (Story Tent/Book Wagon)</p> <p>Crescent Valley Stakeholders (CVTA, CVRC, City of Saint John, UNB, HWSF, YMCA)</p> <p><u>Focus Groups:</u> FRC Play Group Parents (3); Anglin Drive Tenants Assoc.(TBD)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRC play group 1 day/week</li> <li>• FRC Parent info session 1/week</li> <li>• FRC diapers &amp; formula</li> <li>• Slow cooking club</li> <li>• Breakfasts 2 days/week</li> <li>• Food Purchasing Club</li> </ul> <p><u>Hazen White Saint Francis School</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten Readiness/Pre-school 3 days/week (Polka Dot Room); xxx participants</li> <li>• Breakfast/lunch programs</li> <li>• Family literacy evenings</li> <li>• UNB Promise Partnership (reading mentors, etc.)</li> <li>• Library/computer centre</li> </ul> <p><u>Crescent Valley Tenants Association</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book Wagon/Story Tent</li> <li>• Transportation/Safety issues</li> <li>• Crafts for parents/children</li> <li>• Holiday events – Fun Days (summer)</li> <li>• Community Garden</li> </ul>	<p>Experienced community leaders</p> <p>Leadership from Hazen-White Saint Francis</p> <p>UNBSJ Partnership</p> <p>Splash Pad</p> <p>Book wagon/Story tent – 10+ years; consistent following orientation for other neighbourhoods</p> <p>Expanded pre-k program ('Polka Dot Room')</p> <p>Y planning to move to Churchill Blvd. (excitement/concern)</p>	<p>k program? (change in school districts; private donations)</p> <p>Housing maintenance</p> <p>Traffic safety</p> <p>child protection concerns</p>	<p>the parents who attend play groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger integration/coordination of current activities (e.g. 'Polka Dot Room', play groups) – plan next steps towards ELC @ HWSF</li> <li>• Program &amp; Services Matrix nearing completion (UNB) – review programs &amp; gaps for parents &amp; 0-5 year olds</li> </ul>

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
ct'd		<u>Day Care Centres:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Somerset Preschool Center (53 spaces; 2-6 yrs)</li> </ul>			
<b>Old North End</b> 140 children 0-4 85 children 5-9	ONE Change  Centennial School  Main Street Baptist Church	<u>ONE Change</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergency diapers &amp; formula</li> <li>Public Health Nurse 1 day/week</li> <li>Community Police officer</li> <li>Youth program (Lorne Middle School)</li> <li>In progress: turning over management of community centre to ONE Change &amp; development of a community health centre</li> </ul> <u>Main Street Baptist Church:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hope Mission (lunch Tuesday &amp; Friday) – visits by Public Health &amp; Talk with Me – daily lunch for Lorne School students)</li> <li>Sunday school – family events during summer</li> <li>FRC A Recipe for Literacy</li> </ul> <u>North End Food Bank</u>	ONE Change expertise in youth engagement  Potential for management of community centre/health centre  Partnership between ONE Change/Main Street Baptist/Centennial School/Lorne School  Recent upgrades to community parks  Visibility of ONE Change  Comprehensive community plan  New housing	safety (drugs/fires)  Housing stock (asthma)  Mental health  Limited evening bus service to Uptown	FRC <i>A Recipe for Literacy</i> @ Main Street Baptist-talk with parents re. next steps  Meeting to determine best location for play group (YMCA-ONE Change-Main Street Baptist-Centennial School-Portland Preschool) Community

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
<b>Old North End ct'd</b>		<u>Day Care Centres:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portland Day Care @ Centennial School (60 spaces; 2-12 yrs)</li> </ul>			
<b>Waterloo Village</b> 100 children 0-4 65 children 5-9	Waterloo Village Association  Prince Charles School  Saint John Boys & Girls Club  Courtney Bay Tenants Association  First Steps  <u>Focus Groups:</u> Prince Charles School (6); Dr. Christine Davies Educational Centre/First Steps (10)	<u>First Steps</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing for pregnant &amp; parenting teens (12 spaces)</li> <li>In-house day –care</li> <li>High school completion</li> <li>1-on-1 counselling</li> <li>Mentoring program (collab. with FRC, FACE, community business reps. &amp; Vibrant Communities)</li> <li>In-house child development specialist</li> <li>appts. with speech/language, public health, social development, FACE</li> </ul> <u>Community Health Centre</u> <u>Prince Charles School</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kindergarten readiness</li> <li>Family Literacy Evenings</li> <li>PALS – reading mentors, etc.</li> </ul> <u>Courtney Bay:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Story Tent (summer)</li> </ul>	Prince Charles = 1 <sup>st</sup> community school in SJ – model for others  Exp. with pre-k at Prince Charles School  Y at Prince Edward Square  St. Joseph’s Hospital/CHC/First Steps  Growing interest in community garden  First Steps Learning Centre – opportunity for young single moms to complete Education	Physical layout of neighbourhood – major traffic routes/divisions – walking difficult  Drug/Sex trade (needles)  Limited outdoor play space (no green spaces)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-school @ Prince Charles School (fall 2012) - funding secured for 2 mornings/week – add 3<sup>rd</sup> morning?</li> <li>coordinate with a play group @ Prince Edward Square Y?</li> </ul>

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
<b>Waterloo Village ct'd</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community garden</li> <li>• Holiday Parties</li> </ul> <p><u>Boys &amp; Girls Club (6 years + )</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After school/summer programs</li> <li>• Cooking club</li> <li>• Lunch program</li> <li>• Library/computer centre</li> </ul> <p><u>Day Care Centres:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YMCA Prince Edward Square (60 spaces; 2-5 yrs.);</li> <li>• Saint John Boys &amp; Girls Club (24 spaces; 2-4 yrs.);</li> <li>• Coburg Community Day Care Home/ First Steps (3 spaces)</li> </ul> <p>Lil Darlings Daycare (54 spaces; birth-5 yrs.) Uptown?? (Wellington Row)</p>			
<b>East Side<sup>19</sup></b>	<p>Glen Falls School</p> <p>East Side Motivators</p> <p>Focus Group: Mother</p>	<p><u>Glen Falls School</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten readiness (Nov. – June)</li> <li>• Mother Goose &amp; Friends 1 day/wk.</li> </ul> <p><u>Forest Glen Community Center (Forest Hills School):</u></p>	<p>Mother Goose 10+ years @ Glen Falls School; run by volunteers</p> <p>Pre-K program @ Glen Falls starts in Nov.</p>	<p>3 separate sections: Glen Falls – Forest Hills – Reading Crescent – travel between areas not easy</p> <p>East Side Motivators a new group</p>	<p>Planning with Glen Falls School set up a regular FRC play group at Glen Falls School</p>

<sup>19</sup> This is a new area compared to the other priority neighbourhoods. Statistics from the 2011 census are available, but the specific boundaries for this neighbourhood still need to be defined.

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
	Goose & Friends (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Y program 3 days/wk. incl. play group for 0-5 year olds</li> </ul> <u>Glenview United Church</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FRC Parenting program</li> </ul> <u>Day Care Centres:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glen View Preschool (24 spaces; 2-5 yrs)</li> <li>• YM-YWCA Forest Glen &amp; After School Program (45 spaces; 3-12 yrs.)</li> <li>• Little Angels Daycare (51 spaces; 15 mths-12 years)</li> <li>• Living Waters Child Development Centre (40 spaces; birth-5 years)</li> <li>• Played-Out Fun Centre (36 spaces; 2-12 years)</li> </ul>	<p>Y at Forest Glen Community Centre 3 x/week (incl. play group) – transportation for children from Reading Crescent</p> <p>Large number of single moms in Reading Crescent</p>	<p>Green spaces located in Forest Hills/at Glen Falls school</p> <p>Flooding – some families moving?</p>	
<p><b>City-Wide</b> 3,645 children 0-4 3,215 children 5-9</p>	<p>Vibrant Communities Family Resource Centre PALS School District 8 Talk with Me Public Health FACE (Early Intervention) BCAPI</p>		<p>Contribution of community schools to neighbourhood pride parent involvement and improved school performance</p> <p>Agencies/programs committed to building trusting relationships with families</p>	<p>Government programs in transition (public health/education/early childhood); uncertainty for staff and families; delays in starting new programs or groups; potential for some parents to be left out</p> <p>Impact of proposed changes to EI on families living in poverty</p>	<p>Strengthen Coordination/Facilitation function of ECDC</p> <p>Promotion of ECDC; active membership; regular meetings; links with child care providers</p> <p>Re-launch of a parent-friendly early childhood resource web site</p> <p>Integrate family literacy into home visits</p> <p>Integration of services – one trusted relationship/family that can be linked to</p>

Neighbourhood	Contacts Made During Phase I	Current Programs/Services in the Priority Neighbourhoods	Strengths	Challenges	Possible Next Steps
City Wide C'td	Horizon Health YMCA (Early Childhood + Settlement Services) Learning Disabilities Association Human Development Council United Way Social Development (Housing)		Public health increasing home visits with 1 <sup>st</sup> time parents  Home visits by FACE (Early Intervention)  Active collaboration (e.g. Public Health & Talk with Me; Talk with Me & Day Cares)  Stability in staffing  NB Early Childhood Curriculum	Accessing info. on what's available  Cost of transportation (pay for 2 <sup>nd</sup> child under 6)  Limited infant day care spaces  Ongoing budget cuts (Prov. & Fed.)  Not enough ECE grads to fill needs  Diversity of philosophies/approaches  ECDC less visible since establishment of ELC	other services  Develop strategies to reach out to families not yet engaged in activities (peer training, home visits...)  Regular updates/articles in <i>Around the Block</i>  Neighbourhood Advisory Committees?  Training opportunities for staff (e.g. updates in NB Curriculum, Infant Mental Health); work with NBCC re. need for more ECE graduates  Establishing clear roles for partnering

## Conclusion/Next Steps

The findings from the ESIC Phase One project show that the priority neighborhoods of Saint John require more early childhood programming that is tailored to the needs of each community.

We also noted that, although parents had some very clear ideas about what they would like to see for their children, and embraced the idea of starting learning as early as possible, it was much harder for them to articulate what would help them as parents in terms of training, support, etc.

This underscores the need to continue reaching out through trusted relationships and partners to further this dialogue. In fact, although outreach efforts will look very different in each neighbourhood, it is clear from this very brief experience that continuing to reach out to parents on an ongoing basis will be an essential part of any future activities.

While this research was being carried out, the members of the ECDC Steering Committee prepared a proposal for ESIC concerning Phase II of this initiative.

Phase II (July 2012 to March 2013) would be focused on engaging low income families within the integrated Early Learning delivery model of the Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition. A possible first step would be to bring together families who participated in focus groups during Phase I to continue the dialogue on challenges and program opportunities for parents/caregivers of 0-5 year olds and their children, by sharing the research findings with them.

During Phase II of this project, the Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition integrated partnership model plans to:

- Guide the provision of comprehensive supports for families within each of the priority neighbourhood communities;
- Develop meaningful partnerships between schools, community-based organizations and parents in order to avoid duplication of effort and provide the best possible support to families with young children;
- Nurture mutually respectful relationships between early learning and care providers, the community and schools so that each understands and appreciates the other's role and expertise;
- Encourage collaboration through the sharing of resources, participating in joint trainings, co-sponsoring events, sitting on joint committees and engaging in other integrative strategies;
- Based on the research data collected through the ESIC Phase One Project provide a recognized integrated structure that will assist with the leveraging of existing and new community resources and opportunities in order to provide essential supports for families with young children living with-in the priority neighborhoods of Saint John.

Phase I demonstrated the need for a coordinator to facilitate the parent engagement and involvement process. Despite the best efforts of the coalition members, it is no longer possible to coordinate these efforts "off the corner" of their desks if the momentum is to continue. It requires a significant investment in terms of time, training and partnership building to bring together all sectors of the community in a safe, open and constructive forum.

## Recommendations concerning specific programs & activities to consider implementing in Phase II

South End	Lower West Side	Crescent Valley	Old North End
<p>Long term ELC funding (sustainability/expansion)</p> <p>Links with PULSE/SEACATS</p> <p>Parent support group/monthly info. sessions</p> <p>Parent Advisory Council(s)</p> <p>More FRC funding for parenting programs</p>	<p>2<sup>ND</sup> day FRC play group</p> <p>Learning activities on food bank days</p> <p>Contact neighbourhood churches</p> <p>Links with West Side PACT</p> <p>Parenting programs</p>	<p>FRC Playgroup Promotion/link with Anglin Drive</p> <p>Integration/coordination of activities</p> <p>Next steps towards ELC @ HWSF</p> <p>UNB Program &amp; Services Matrix</p> <p>Parenting programs</p>	<p><i>FRC A Recipe for Literacy @ Main Street Baptist</i></p> <p>Focus group with parents concerning next steps</p> <p>Location for YMCA play group</p> <p>Parenting programs</p>
Waterloo Village	East Side	City Wide	Other
<p>Pre-school @ Prince Charles School</p> <p>YMCA Play group @ Prince Edward Square Y</p> <p>Parenting programs</p>	<p>Regular FRC Play Group @ Glen Falls School</p> <p>Parenting programs</p>	<p>Strengthen/Promote ECDC</p> <p>Parent-friendly website of early childhood services</p> <p>Integration/Partnerships</p> <p>Family advisory function</p> <p>Outreach Strategies</p> <p>Staff Training</p>	<p>Weekend/summer programs</p> <p>Access to specialists</p> <p>Programs for Dads</p> <p>Physical activity programs for 0-6 year-olds that involve parents</p>

# **Recommendation on how to ensure ongoing parent and community involvement in early childhood development activities and programs**

A number of ECDC partners are looking at setting up parent advisory ‘committees’ or other mechanisms for ensuring ongoing input from parents and community members in program development and evaluation. As a starting point, we gathered some input on this topic during our interviews and focus groups:

## “This is a process, not an event”.<sup>20</sup>

- The guidelines that are put into place to manage discussions and create a safe place for open dialogue are just as important, if not more important, than the structure itself.
- The same trust-based and nonjudgmental relationships that are key to engaging parents in activities with their children are just as important around a meeting table
- It is worth taking time to do this process well, building agreement from the beginning on what the purpose of the group is to be, developing tools such as a Code of Conduct, a clear understanding of confidentiality, and an effective mechanism for resolving conflicts. It is also helpful to review these tools each time the group comes together.

## Be aware of potential conflicts and address issues immediately.

- There is no room for gossip in these forums, or safety is compromised. Once compromised, it is difficult to re-establish.
- Having current program participants on Boards and Committees has often led to difficulties, particularly a confusion of roles between staff, parents and Board. It is worth considering whether only past participants should have an advisory or staff role. (See below for other mechanisms that would allow for input from current participants.)

## The best training often comes through concrete problem-solving

- This gives participants an opportunity to take on responsibility, builds skills, and creates real empowerment. (For example: when a gap in programming is identified, participating in the team that develops the proposal for new funding)
- Everyone has something to contribute; a two-way relationship (‘giving’ as well as ‘getting’) is the key to empowerment

## Ensure there are an appropriate amount of resources so sustainability is not a worry

- In order to get parents fully engaged you need child care and transportation; these funds are not always available but are critical to making their participation a success
- Need funds for a support staff to mentor parents to take part

## A committee is not the only way to get parent input.

- Keeping in mind the many demands on their time, it is sometime just as effective to hold one-on-one informal conversations or periodic focus groups or ‘speak outs’, or use confidential surveys. Provided confidentiality is ensured, electronic means such as e-mails and social media are also viable options for some parents.

---

<sup>20</sup> Lori Doyle, Principal of Prince Charles School. As quoted by Debbie Fisher, PALS Coordinator. May 18, 2012.

## Appendices

### *Appendix I: ECDC Background Document*



Supporting our Children, Building our Future

### **Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition (SJECD)**

The SJECD was formed in March of 2002 with the following vision:

***For the benefit of children and families, stakeholders together will collaborate on key issues and strategies to develop, promote and celebrate quality early childhood education and development in Greater Saint John, accessible to all.***

The Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition (SJECD) is a collaboration of individuals from the business, government and community sectors who are committed to working collaboratively to strengthen the capacity of the Saint John community to support families with children who are from 0-5 years of age.

Members of the SJECD understand how critical the experiences of the earliest years of life are to healthy childhood outcomes and success in adulthood. They also know that for every dollar invested in quality early childhood education, the return on investment is significant and carries long term social and economic benefits for individuals, families and communities.

Over the years, the SJECD has supported a number of initiatives in its pursuit of improving early childhood outcomes and readiness for school. They include:

- Information, education and training sessions for service providers;
- A family focused website (SJ Kid);  
(In February of 2012 the organizers of this website discontinued the website due to lack of funding.)
- An electronic Childcare Database (<http://sjhdc.ca/community-database/>);

- Fundraising for various early childhood programs and outreach services for neighborhoods;
- Special community events for young families;
- *An Understanding the Early Years* (HRSD-C) research project that measured every child’s readiness for school in School District 8;
- The establishment of the Early Learning Centre at St. John the Baptist-King Edward School (Saint John’s first comprehensive early childhood development centre that integrates education, health, and child care services to serve young children and their parents in one of Saint John’s priority neighborhoods.)

**Member Organizations of the SJECD:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School District 8</li> <li>• NB Dept. of Social Development-SJ</li> <li>• Horizon Health Network (Saint John)</li> <li>• Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI)</li> <li>• Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ)</li> <li>• The Family Resource Centre (S.J.) Inc.</li> <li>• Family and Early Childhood Education (formerly Early Intervention SJ Inc.)</li> <li>• Saint John YMCA-YWCA</li> <li>• First Steps Housing</li> <li>• Learning Disabilities Association SJ</li> <li>• PALS Community Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saint John Boys and Girls Club</li> <li>• Saint John Medical Community</li> <li>• United Way of Greater Saint John</li> <li>• Canadian Mental Health Association</li> <li>• UNB</li> <li>• NBCC</li> <li>• City of Saint John</li> <li>• Human Development Council</li> <li>• Quality Learning New Brunswick</li> <li>• Early Childhood Care and Education NB</li> <li>• NB Dept of Wellness, Culture, Sport</li> <li>• Sisters of Charity I.C.</li> <li>• Crescent Valley Resource Centre</li> <li>• Old North End Neighbourhood Group</li> <li>• Main Street Baptist Church</li> </ul>
---	---

**For more information, please contact:**

**Silvia Borsic**

**c/o The Family Resource Centre (S.J.) Inc. 633-2182 [saintjohn@frc-crf.com](mailto:saintjohn@frc-crf.com)**

## ***Appendix II: List of Research Participants***

### **Non-profit**

Saint John the Baptist King Edward Early Learning Centre (1)  
Family Resource Centre (5)  
People United in the Lower South End/PULSE (2)  
South End Day Care (1)  
Crescent Valley Resource Centre (2)  
Quality Learning NB (2)  
Crescent Valley Tenants Association (6)  
Anglin Drive Tenants Association (4)  
West Side Coop Pre School (1)  
ONE Change (2)  
Main Street Baptist Church (1)  
Waterloo Village Association (1)  
Saint John Boys & Girls Club (2)  
Courtney Bay Tenants Association (5)  
First Steps (3)  
East Side Motivators (1)  
Vibrant Communities (1)  
Family and Child Education/FACE (2)  
YMCA  
    Early Childhood (2)  
    Settlement Services (3)  
Learning Disabilities Association Saint John Chapter (1)  
Human Development Council (2)  
United Way (1)

### **Business**

Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative/BCAPI (1)  
Partners Assisting Local Schools/PALS (2)

### **Government**

Saint John the Baptist-King Edward School (1)  
Hazen White – Saint Francis School (5)  
Centennial School (1)  
Prince Charles School (1)  
Glen Falls School (1)  
Saint Patrick's School (2)  
Public Health (3)  
Social Development (Housing) (1)  
Horizon Health  
    Marketplace Wellness Centre (2)  
    *Talk with Me* speech/language program (9)  
    Developmental Pediatrician  
City of Saint John (3)

## Citizens

### Focus Groups:

Family Resource Centre (9 parents & caregivers/9 children

Prince Charles School (6 parents & caregivers/12 children);

Dr. Christine Davies Educational Centre/First Steps (10 parents & caregivers/15 children)

### Play Groups:

Lower West Side (15 parents & caregivers/20 children)

Crescent Valley (3 parents & caregivers/5 children)

Glen Falls Mother Goose & Friends (5 parents & caregivers/9 children)

A Recipe for Literacy: (6 parents & caregivers/6 children)

## *Appendix III: Copies of Survey Questionnaires*

### **Family Interview**

Participant(s):

Neighbourhood:

Date:

---

- What programs/activities/services do you participate in? How did you hear about the programs? If you are not participating in any programs, why not?
- What do you/your kids enjoy about these programs? Any suggestions for improving these programs or activities?
- How have they been helpful? Have they made anything more difficult or challenging for you? (for example - transportation, child care....)
- What kind of changes have you seen in your children? In yourself?
- Where have you run into difficulties/what has been difficult for you in terms of participating in programs, getting linked up with the services you need...(for example: transportation, extra expenses, conflicts with other members of the group, etc.)
- Do you use child care in your neighbourhood so you can participate in activities? If not, why not?
- What (else) would you like to see for young children 0-5 in the neighbourhood? What (else) would help you as a parent of young children?
- What works best for you in terms of providing your input/having your voice heard about what is happening in the neighbourhood?

## Community Partner Interview

Name:

Organization:

Date:

---

- Updated info. on programs, costs, contact info. etc. (from parents' handbook/HDC on-line database)

### Successes

- What is working well -programs for young children that are growing, what are parents and children responding to well, etc.

### Challenges

- Where are organizations serving 0-5 year olds and their families in this neighbourhood having difficulty/being stretched/what could they be doing better?
- What you see parents of young children struggling with?
- What are some challenges/concerns in the neighbourhood, particularly as they relate to families with young children?
- If additional funding was available for early childhood development activities, what would you do? (unmet needs, next steps, expansion of certain programs....)
- What evaluations, stats., reports do you have available to incorporate into our research report?
- What kind of mechanisms do you have for parent/participant input? What seems to work best for consulting with parents/getting their feed-back and ideas?

Other Comments/Suggestions (incl. websites to visit from other cities, etc.)

## Service Provider Interview

Name:

Organization:

Date:

---

Updated info. on programs, costs, contact info. etc. (from parents' handbook/HDC on-line database)

- Are programs one on one or group programs - group
- Do parents stay on site to take part in the program with their children or do they leave.
- Are the programs facilitated by staff and/or volunteers?
- What type of training is provided to the program facilitators?
- How many parents and children take part in the program
- For the programs that are directed to only the parents are the parents provided with childcare support
- Is it a requirement that the parents use a daycare or can the parent receive funding support to hire their own childcare provider
- Are the parents offered transportation support to get to the program
- Where do the parents come from...are they mainly from the neighbourhood or do they come from outside the neighbourhood.
- How long has the program been offered
- Do you currently have a wait list for your activities?

### Successes

What is working well, programs that are growing, what are parents and children responding to well, etc.

- Why do you think that the program is working well
- Would the organization be willing to share its "hands on, learned through experience gained knowledge /best practices" with other early childhood organizations. If so – what would be the best/easiest way to share...i.e. ECDC arranged workshops, speaker series; allow others to "shadow" their programs. If not willing to share why not.

### Challenges

Where is organization stretched/having difficulty/could do better

- Why is the organization having difficulty...ie. Lack of funds, lack of trained staff, inability to keep trained staff due to low wages, funder rules and regulations as to how the program is to be offered, waiting lists for programs that become so long that it takes a very long time for the parent to be able to access the program, etc.

### What you see parents struggling with?

- How do you deal with the parent struggles that fall outside your organization's mandate. Referrals, send the message of the need to potential funders, share it with community partners etc.

### Challenges/concerns in the neighbourhood?

- What does the organization do with its challenges/concerns about the neighbourhood - share with community partners, talk to elected officials, ....Does the organization have any suggestions on how to deal with the current challenges that they are seeing in the neighbourhood as it relates to early childhood

### If additional funding were available for early childhood development activities, what would you do? (unmet needs, next steps, expansion of certain programs....)

- Do you partner with other organizations in the community to facilitate programming together, to program plan together, etc. What suggestions do you have to encourage/make it easier for more early childhood organizations to partner together. If they do not partner why not.

### What evaluations, statistics., reports do you have available?

### What kind of mechanisms do you have for parent input? What seems to work best for consulting with parents/getting their feed-back and ideas?

### Other Comments/Suggestions

## ***Appendix IV: List of Research Documents and Websites***

### **Documents**

Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (Saint John)

- An Approach to Reducing Poverty in Saint John. Summary of Recommendations  
Prepared by Deloitte & Touche Management Solutions. April 27, 2000
- 2011-2012 Report Card

Cottes, Jeffery. Parent-Child Coalitions. Innovative Public Sector Management and Early Childhood Development in Manitoba. In Canadian Public Administration/Administration Publique du Canada. Volume 54, No. 30 (September/septembre 2011. Pp. 377-398

First Steps Housing Project Inc. Saint John, New Brunswick

- Literature Review. Poverty, Homelessness and Teenage Pregnancy. Evaluation Designs. Fredericton, New Brunswick. February 2006.

Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Greater Saint John's Vital Signs<sup>c</sup> 2011. Our Region's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Checkup. October, 2011.

Hamilton Best Start, Hamilton Ontario

- Parent Charter Internal Communications Toolkit. Part One. Date Unavailable.

Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain, J. Fraser Mustard, Kerry McCuaig Early Years Study 3: Making Decisions, Taking Action. 2011

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. Highlights of Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities (PACFOLD) 2008.

Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick Ltd. Summary notes of the Saint John Round Table of Family Literacy. Prepared by Lynda Anne Home. November 18, 2010.

National League of Cities Institute for You, Education & Families. Educational Alignment for Young Children: Profiles of Local Innovation. Washington DC. 2012

ONE Change, Inc. Saint John, New Brunswick

- ONE Voice Social Programming Initiative. 12/1/2010 Prepared for ONE Change Inc. By students from UNB
- OLD North End. ONE Plan. Prepared for ONE Change Inc. August 2010

Province of New Brunswick

- Be Ready for Success: A 10-Year Early Childhood Strategy for New Brunswick. Department of Social Development. June 2008.
- Putting Children First. Positioning Early Childhood for the Future. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. June 2012.

Public Health Agency of Canada.

- Summative Evaluation of the Community Action Program for Children: 2004-2009.
- Mental Health in Atlantic Canada; A Snapshot 2012. Produced by Lesley Latham for the Public Health Agency of Canada Atlantic Regional Office. June 2012.
- Understanding the Early Years: Greater Saint John, New Brunswick. A community Research Report. J. Douglas Willms with R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd.. KSI Associates Ltd. Prepared for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Spring 2010

Saint John Early Learning Centre. An Early Years Focus for Future Prosperity in Saint John. The 2012-2016 Saint John Early Learning Centre Sustainability Plan. December 2011

Saint John Human Development Council

- Child Poverty Report Card: New Brunswick. November 2011.
- Human Services Community Database (on line)

Tough, Paul. Whatever it Takes. Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America. Houghton Mifflin. New York. 2008.

Toronto First Duty. Toronto, Ontario.

- Research findings from Phase 2 of Toronto First Duty and their Implications for Full Day Learning in Ontario. November 26, 2009.
- The Bruce WoodGreen Case Study. Zeenat, Janmohahed et al. November 2011

Vibrant Communities Saint John

- Poverty in Plenty II: A Statistical Snapshot of the Quality of Life in Saint John. November 2008.

Understanding the Early Years Greater Saint John.

- Community Mapping Report. Family Plus Life Solutions. December 2008
- Community Action Plan. Family Plus Life Solutions. Saint John, New Brunswick. December 2008
- Early Childhood Services & Resources Parents Handbook. Greater Saint John area. Family Plus Life Solutions. Fall 2008.

Yohsie Kaga, John Bennet, Peter Moss. Caring & Learning Together. A Cross-national study of the integration of early Childhood Care & Education within education. UNESCO, Paris. 2010

## Websites

Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs

[www.frp.ca](http://www.frp.ca)

Chances Family Centre, Charlottetown PEI

[www.chancesfamily.ca](http://www.chancesfamily.ca)

Government of New Brunswick

- Department of Education & Early Childhood Development
- Department of Social Development

[www.gnb.ca](http://www.gnb.ca)

Hamilton Best Start

[www.hamiltonbeststart.ca](http://www.hamiltonbeststart.ca)

Harlem Children's Zone

[www.hcz.org](http://www.hcz.org)

Saint John Human Development Council

[www.sjhdc.ca](http://www.sjhdc.ca)

Understanding the Early Years

[http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/community\\_partnerships/early\\_years/reports/uey.gsj.pdf](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/community_partnerships/early_years/reports/uey.gsj.pdf)

Toronto First Duty

[www.toronto.ca/firstduty/](http://www.toronto.ca/firstduty/)

Vibrant Communities Saint John

[www.sjhdc.povertyreduction/vcsj.html](http://www.sjhdc.povertyreduction/vcsj.html)

## ***Appendix V: Success Stories/Quotes from the Participants***

### **The Early Learning Centre at Saint John the Baptist King Edward School**

Located in Saint John's South End, the Early Learning Centre (ELC) at Saint John the Baptist-King Edward School is one of nine pilot projects in the province. It was established with the support of the ECDC in 2009 and involves 15 active partners.

The ELC day care is operated by the Saint John YMCA for 39 children aged 2-5 years. The children learn through both the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Framework and the YMCA *Playing to Learn* curriculum. In addition, the ELC offers drop-in playgroups, kindergarten readiness programs, an adult and children's lending library, community kitchens, physical activity and crafts programs. In collaboration with Public Health and FACE, there are programs for young mothers and 3.5 clinics. Staff from the *Talk with Me* early language program provide both one-on-one and group sessions. The Family Resource Centre has provided a number of programs to the ELC. Staff from the ELC and the Family Resource Centre have co-facilitated a number of parenting sessions, and see great potential for expanding this aspect of programming. A door-to-door campaign to every family in the neighbourhood was instrumental in telling parents about the ELC and resulted in a 300% increase in participation at the drop-in play groups. Parents value the ELC because it has become a 'one-stop-shop' for linking up with all these services while accessing quality child care. The school staff and administration appreciate the participation of the little children in school assemblies and events, and have commented on the very smooth transition to kindergarten for these families. As more ELC 'graduates' move into Kindergarten this fall, it is anticipated the EDI scores of these youngsters will have improved over previous years, supporting the best practice of integrating early childhood development and education. The 2010 evaluation by HERG indicated that the Saint John ELC is the most advanced of the 9 pilot sites.<sup>21</sup>

### **The 'Polka Dot Room' at Hazen-White Saint Francis School**

Following a visit to the Harlem Children's Zone, the Principal of Hazen White Saint Francis School began taking the next steps towards an Early Learning Centre in the Crescent Valley neighbourhood. With financial support from the Early Childhood Development Coalition, McInnis-Cooper, a local law firm, and the school district, an early education centre (dubbed 'The Polka Dot Room' because of its very colourful walls) opened in October 2011. Staffed by 3 teachers, it welcomes up to 18 3 and 4-years olds in a morning and an afternoon session. Starting in the fall, the mornings are dedicated to children from Crescent Valley who will be attending Hazen White Saint Francis the next year. In the spring, children who will be attending two other schools in the area follow the regular pre-k curriculum for 4 weeks each in the afternoons. Children participate in painting, construction, colouring, numbers, listening to books, puzzles and other activities to develop their gross and fine motor skills, as well as the listening and social skills they will need in school. As the sessions progress, they move from more play-based activities to activities very similar to what they will see in kindergarten. Children are given

---

<sup>21</sup> A Early Years Focus for Future Prosperity in Saint John. The 2012-2016 Saint John Early Learning Centre Sustainability Plan. Saint John Early Learning, Centre. December 2011.

a pre and post assessments on key Kindergarten-readiness skills, as determined by the school district. Starting earlier in the school year has allowed the children from Crescent Valley to catch up to the children from other neighbourhoods. Of the 20 students who will be entering Hazen White Saint Francis this year, 10 attended the group and 10 did not. Of the 10 children that attended group, 9 had an acceptable kindergarten readiness level. Of the 10 children that did not attend the group, only 1 had an acceptable level.<sup>22</sup> The children see school as a fun place to be, which helps to overcome some of the messages they may be receiving from parents or older siblings whose school experience may not have been so positive.

## **Family Resource Centre Outreach Play Groups in the Lower West Side and Crescent Valley**

Structured play groups attended by 0-5 year olds and their parents/caregivers have been a core program of family resource centres since their creation. Five years ago, in response to requests from local parents, the Saint John Family Resource Centre, with some funding from the ECDC took the play group model out to two priority neighbourhoods: Crescent Valley (Crescent Valley Resource Centre) and the Lower West Side (Carleton Community Centre). The play groups run 1 morning a week for 2 hours, and include parent/child play time, a craft, a snack, songs and story time. Often the play groups are visited by someone from *Talk with Me*, public health or FACE (formerly early intervention), to answer parents' questions or present information. Parent information sessions also take place at these two locations on a regular basis. When interviewed, parents observed how their children talk more and interact with other children, even in the first few weeks of attending a play group. They also appreciate the opportunity to get out of the house and exchange ideas with other parents of young children. A natural support group is formed. The keys to the success of this model have been 1) partnerships with local community groups to find a suitable location, 2) excellent staffing, 3) a safe and welcoming atmosphere, and 4) ensuring that parents and children from diverse backgrounds (income, culture, education, etc.) are involved to encourage positive peer parenting role models. Attendance at the Lower West Side group in particular has grown consistently to the point where parents are looking for a second day of activities, especially given the limited number of services for infants and toddlers in this neighbourhood. Another recent highlight was the opportunity for parents from one of the Family Resource Centre's rural outreach play groups to make baby blankets with members of the Lower West Side and Crescent Valley groups, further promoting interaction between parents of many different backgrounds.

---

<sup>22</sup> Visit to Polka Dot Room, May 30, 2012.

## ***Appendix VI: Community Momentum***

### **Community Schools**

Each of Saint John's priority neighbourhoods has at least one designated community school. During this research, we were fortunate to talk with the principals or community school coordinators of the elementary-level community school in six neighbourhoods. It is clear that community schools are an important asset and a hub of activity in the priority neighbourhoods. Parents are responding to outreach activities; seeing new approaches to education in action and beginning to overcome their own, sometimes negative experiences at school. Private sector volunteers and donations are significantly increasing each school's resources and impact, for example upgrading libraries and computer labs, providing reading and math tutors, hot lunch and breakfast programs. The community school experiment began 11 years ago with JDI Inc. 'adopting' Prince Charles School in the Waterloo Village neighbourhood. It has become such a fixture for the students, staff and volunteers there that on a recent visit by the Minister of Education, he was asked by a young pupil *"Are you a new mentor here? Well, I need help with my snowsuit. Can you give me a hand?"*<sup>23</sup> All kidding aside, each community school has established a variety of partnerships with large and small businesses in its neighbourhood, as well as local community groups. A recent issue of the community newspaper Around the Block was dedicated to the community schools activities and partners. It showed how each community school has at least 8-10 partners involved in many different activities.

The community schools also have a strong commitment to preparing children for Kindergarten through an expanded K-readiness program wherever possible. For example, Glen Falls School begins its program each November and has hosted a 'Mother Goose and Friends' group run by volunteers for 10 years. Hazen-White St. Francis school has established 'The Polka Dot Room' (see story above) which serves students from three different schools. The long range vision of the ECDC members is to have an Early Learning Centre (see article above) in each priority neighbourhood, and this vision was echoed in our discussions with the community schools.

### **Saint John Early Childhood Development Coalition**

Established in 2002 the SJECDC collaboration of individuals from business, government and the community sector have worked together to strengthen the capacity of the Saint John community to support families with children who are from 0 – 5 years of age. Some of the SJECDC supported initiatives include: An Understanding the Early Years project, the establishment of an Early Learning Centre as well as providing the infrastructure for the dispersal and monitoring of the Saint John allocation of Community's Raising Children (CRC) funds. One of the SJECDC supported initiatives included the parent managed Saint John Kid Website; unfortunately this website that was popular with service providers and parents was discontinued due to lack of funding.

---

<sup>23</sup> Interview with PALS coordinators. May 18, 2012.

All individuals and groups who participated in the Phase 1 project were briefed on the SJECDL mission and on its accomplishments (see SJECDL Background document in Appendix 1); through the Phase 1 project, the SJECDL was able to invite new groups and individuals to become SJECDL members.

There was a strong agreement from all involved in the Phase 1 project that additional early childhood development programs and services are required with-in the priority neighborhoods of Saint John; emphasizing the need and relevance of the SJECDL.

On June 1<sup>st</sup> the SJECDL membership held a special meeting to review the findings and recommendations contained in this Phase 1 report; committing to working together on a common set of actions.

***Appendix VII: Financial Report***