

# Steps

## ECMap Newsletter

Early Child Development Mapping Project

Spring – April 2011

## Discovering Lymburn shares its expertise

Lymburn received its first Early Development Instrument (EDI) results in 2007 as one of 29 neighbourhoods in an Edmonton pilot project. The residents of this quiet, largely middle-class suburb near West Edmonton Mall, were taken aback by the results.

Although the community scored high on socio-economic status, EDI results for Lymburn's kindergarten children were low. Nearly 44 per cent were developmentally vulnerable, scoring in the bottom ten per cent on one or more scales of development according to national norms.

Community leaders, including service providers, teachers and parents, wanted to find some answers to the anomaly and started to meet together, forming the Discovering Lymburn group. As part of its discovery process, the group began asking residents what they liked about their community and what changes they'd like to see.

"The number one thing that we heard over and over again was 'more gatherings,'" says Maria Montgomery, part-time coordinator of Discovering Lymburn. "People said they wanted more community events to break through the isolation."

Built in the 1970s, Lymburn is a 'mature' suburb, but there are few community gathering places or amenities other than those available in nearby Callingwood. The closure of the outdoor rink several years earlier left a big hole in the community.



Kimberley Bewick, left, and Maria Montgomery, Discovering West Edmonton coalition

The group organized family-oriented events to bring people together. To build cohesion and purpose, it also adopted a positive, strength-based organizational approach known as Appreciative Inquiry. Members received training in and began using the four-part Appreciative Inquiry process — discover, dream, design and deliver — to develop their vision, mission and strategic plan.

The group is now looking to expand its community conversations, says Montgomery. "People are more likely to become involved in something that they've inputted into."

Discovering Lymburn is also sharing its experience with its new parent body, the Discovering West Edmonton coalition, as part of the provincewide Early Childhood Development (ECD) Mapping Initiative. Discovering West Edmonton incorporates Lymburn as part of a geographic area that extends west from 124<sup>th</sup> St. to the city

**we engage**

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boundary, north to St. Albert and south to the North Saskatchewan River.

As a mother of four young children, Montgomery feels a personal stake in the success of the Initiative. So does Kimberley Bewick, who sits on the Discovering West Edmonton steering committee along with Montgomery. Bewick, a community librarian at the Edmonton Public Library, Woodcroft Branch, has two young children, aged 3 and 5. "You can't build healthy communities without healthy children and vice versa. Succession planning begins with building positive environments for young children."

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**For more information about Appreciative Inquiry, please go to <http://www.iisd.org/ai/>**

# Early childhood development



Young children naturally invite interaction.

Photo: Laurel McCalla

## 8 things everyone should know about early development

*Will listening to Mozart make your baby smarter?*

*Is brain development solidified after age three?*

*The short answer to both questions is no, although popular misconceptions have suggested otherwise.*

**The Mozart Effect:** Parents were advised to play classical music tapes to their babies after it was incorrectly and widely reported that this would improve their IQ. What researchers found — based on limited findings in adults, not children — was that listening to a Mozart piano sonata may temporarily improve spatial intelligence or the ability to think in pictures.

**It's all over by age three:** Misinterpretation of research on sensitive periods of brain development led to other wrong conclusions — namely, that brain development was essentially complete by age three. What studies indicated, however, is that developing brain functions are particularly receptive, or sensitive, to environmental influences during the early years. The brain continues to develop and change throughout life, however.

### How to separate facts from fiction?

Scientists became concerned over inaccurate media coverage of the rapid advances made by neuroscience in the 1990s, especially when this led to misguided policies and parenting advice. The Harvard-based National Scientific Council on the Developing Child brought together leading experts and a U.S. communications think tank on social issues called FrameWorks to tackle the problem. After seven years, the council was able to create “a core story on child development” that was scientifically accurate and easy to understand.

The eight key concepts were presented in an article recently published in the *Child Development* journal.

1. Child development lays the foundation for community and economic development. Healthy children create healthy communities and economies.
2. The architecture of the brain is built through a step-by-step process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Building a strong foundation in the early years increases the chances of positive development, and vice versa.
3. One skill leads to another. Brain development occurs from the bottom up, with increasingly complex skills and capacities built on top of simpler skills and capacities.
4. Thinking, emotional, physical and social skills are intertwined. So is learning and behaviour, and mental and physical health. You cannot address one area without affecting the others.
5. Children's relationships with family, caregivers and the community shape the wiring of the developing brain. This happens through a serve and return process, like in a tennis or volleyball game. Young children naturally reach out for interaction. When adults respond consistently and appropriately, the brain is wired in a way that supports healthy development. When adults do not respond or respond negatively, the brain is wired in a way that leads to dysfunction and difficulties.
6. Toxic stress in early childhood, caused by extreme poverty and abuse, for example, can damage the developing brain and cause lifelong difficulties in behaviour, learning and mental and physical health.
7. The brain becomes less malleable and behaviour more difficult to change over time. Providing children with the right supports for healthy early development is an effective preventative measure.
8. Early childhood supports can be measured for their effectiveness, and sound policy and program choices can then be made.

Source: Jack P. Shonkoff and Susan Nall Bales. *Science Does Not Speak for Itself: Translating Child Development Research for the Public and its Policymakers*. Child Development. January/February 2011, Volume 82, Number 1, pages 17-32. Control-click [here](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01538.x/pdf) or go to <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01538.x/pdf>

# Community coalitions



## Revelstoke: The little community that could



Tracy Spannier plays dress-up with Lauryn Kline, 5, at a Family Night Out program in Revelstoke.

Like the plucky steam engine in the popular children's story, *The Little Engine that Could*, a small B.C. community has pulled off a remarkable feat with bold visioning, determination and hard work.

Revelstoke recorded the second lowest early childhood development vulnerability results in B.C. last fall. When wave four of Early Development Instrument (EDI) results were released for the province in September 2010, Revelstoke had a vulnerability rate of 15 per cent for kindergarten children. The percentage was half the provincial rate which had soared to 30.3 per cent.

Revelstoke, a mountain community of about 8,100 residents, has consistently recorded one of the lowest rates for developmental vulnerability in B.C. since it first began collecting EDI data in 2004. The city is now lauded as a model for community engagement in early childhood development across Canada.

### Did you know?

Success by 6 uses a community-based model for promoting healthy early development and was pioneered in Minnesota in 1989. It was adapted by the United Way and is used across North America.

### What's the secret of Revelstoke's success?

"Building relationships at every level," responds Tracy Spannier, coordinator of Revelstoke's Early Childhood Development (ECD) Committee. "The folks here really work well together."

By 'folks,' Spannier means everyone from the school district superintendent to kindergarten teachers, child care providers, public health nurses, local business people and service group members.

The Early Childhood Development Committee was organized in 2004 as a local Success by 6 initiative. School District #19, led by Superintendent Anne Cooper, got on board right from start. Cooper not only joined the steering committee, but enlisted its expertise in rolling out two Ministry of Education programs for preschoolers. Kindergarten teachers (who fill out EDI questionnaires on children as part of the data collection) were encouraged to join the committee and take turns in attending meetings.

"I tell my colleagues that our success as a school district depends a great deal upon how successful children are *before* they enter school," says Cooper.

The committee broadened its membership to include more than 20 non-profit groups and government-funded agencies. A community survey was undertaken, and steps were taken to achieve tangible results on issues that were identified and could be tackled immediately. The City and service groups were enlisted in putting up playground equipment in local parks. Downtown businesses were persuaded to install change tables in public washrooms. A children and family services directory and monthly calendar of events were produced to promote programs and services.

### Quick facts: Revelstoke

Population: 8,100

Average household income: \$49,514 (2006 census)

Industry: Tourism, saw mills and wood manufacturing, Canadian Pacific Railway

By 2005, the committee had hammered out a strategic plan, and began reviewing its goals and setting priorities every year. Working collaboratively — or "breaking down the silos" as Spannier puts it — has been the committee's biggest accomplishment. By working together, the various groups and agencies have avoided duplication in programs, minimized conflicts in scheduling and provided more cohesive services. This approach has also paid off during a time of funding cutbacks.

"Instead of competing for a smaller slice of the pie, we've built a bigger pie by putting all the money on the table and looking for ways to co-sponsor programs," says Spannier.

Cooper is sold on the benefits of the community's support for positive early development.

"We have the lowest ever numbers of children that are flagged in elementary school as moderate or severely behaviour disordered.

We've gone from more than 16 elementary students who are identified annually to one student. That's happened in the space of five or six years in our school district," Cooper says.



B.C. School District #19 Superintendent Anne Cooper

To contact Tracy Spannier, coordinator, Revelstoke ECD Committee: [tspannier@cbal.org](mailto:tspannier@cbal.org)

# Profiles

## Baby Clare helps keep mom on track

Clare Ezekiel-Brown is the youngest member of the Fort McMurray Early Childhood Development (ECD) Coalition. Despite her non-voting status, Clare makes her lively presence felt at meetings, shredding papers that fall within her grasp and thumping board-room tables with enthusiasm. Her attendance record is good.

Clare comes to meetings when child-care issues arise, which happens frequently given the non-traditional hours her mom works. 'Mom' is Tinna Ezekiel, EMap's community development coordinator for Zone 10, which encompasses Fort McMurray. "The coalition is very accepting of Clare," she says.

Ezekiel began bringing Clare, now seven months old, to meetings last fall when she found herself juggling a new baby along with her new job as a community development coordinator.

Like many young working mothers, Ezekiel is torn with guilt between the need to earn a

living and the desire to spend more time with her child. Finding affordable, quality child care is also a challenge, especially evenings and weekends, in a resource town with a young, rapidly growing population. Ezekiel considers herself fortunate in having a supportive network of family and friends.

Fort McMurray is a wonderful place to raise a family, says Ezekiel, who takes issue with what she calls 'media stereotypes' of a rough, rootless oil and gas town. She feels deeply connected to Fort McMurray where she was born and raised, and where her parents settled after leaving Newfoundland in search of jobs during Alberta's 1980s oil boom.

Her own travels have taken her far. Ezekiel, who holds a master's degree in public health, has worked with infectious disease (HIV and TB) control projects and with abandoned and orphaned children in South Africa and India. Closer to home, she served as program director for Girls Incorporated of Northern Alberta, which encourages girls to reach their potential. She ran anger management programs for adults and teens for the Canadian Mental Health Association. She also worked with the Wood Buffalo HIV/AIDS Society, organizing HIV and Hep C awareness programs for students, sex trade workers and intravenous drug users, doing research and networking with communities in the Fort McMurray region.



Tinna Ezekiel and Clare

Working in these different environments taught her the importance of healthy early development, she says. And in case she forgets, "Clare is a constant reminder of why this work is so important."

*Tinna Ezekiel is EMap community development coordinator for Zone 10, which encompasses Fort McMurray, Fort McKay, Anzac, Janvier, Conklin and Fort Smith. It also includes First Nations and Métis communities at Fort Chipewyan, Janvier, Gregoire Lake and Fort McKay. Ezekiel can be reached at 780-715-8469 or [cezekiel@ualberta.ca](mailto:cezekiel@ualberta.ca)*

## Links

### Attention parents and caregivers!

You can find lots of great information on early childhood development, tips for parents and resources on the Zero to Three website. Zero to Three is a U.S. nonprofit organization that promotes the healthy development of babies and toddlers. [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

Check out *The Power of Play*, a booklet that provides information on how different types of play support development. <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/social-emotional-development/thepowerofplay.pdf>

## Contact us

The Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMAP) is part of the Early Child Development Mapping Initiative, which is funded by Alberta Education. ECMP is led by the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP), Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta.

For further information, please go to [www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca](http://www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca) and click on our logo

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