

June 30, 2010



## First Nations Early Childhood Development Council

**Re: Help shape a bright future for the children in your community:  
Provide your input on the *BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework***

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Allow me to introduce the BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Council. We are a group of stakeholders that came together in March 2007 to advocate for First Nations children and early childhood development. We successfully secured the support needed to develop a First Nations-specific Early Childhood Development (ECD) Framework, and we need your input in order to finalize this Framework and begin taking action.

Young children are our priority for so many reasons. Early childhood, from the prenatal stage to six years of age, is a critical period in a child's life. It's a time when we can take action to alleviate or prevent circumstances that might otherwise impact children for the rest of their lives. Early brain development research shows that the first six years of a child's life are crucial for providing the foundation for lifelong learning and good health. Furthermore:

- The on-reserve status Indian population is growing at a rate that is almost two times that of the Canadian population.<sup>1</sup>
- Aboriginal children are a growing segment of children in British Columbia – representing more than 10% of the overall B.C. student population.<sup>2</sup>
- As of March 2010, Aboriginal children represent 54% of the children in the care of the BC Ministry of Children and Families.<sup>3</sup>
- Canada is a signatory to a United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.<sup>4</sup>

For First Nations children, the early years are also crucial for building an identity and sense of self, which are strong foundations for strong First Nations communities. In addition, ECD programs and services can serve as important sites for cultural rejuvenation, language revitalization, and community (re)building.

Universal access to a holistic, seamless continuum of quality ECD programs, services and resources is especially important for First Nations children and families, given the continuing realities of poverty and the developmental and educational disparities between First Nations and non-First Nations children.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2009-2010/inst/ian/ian01-eng.asp>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/performance.htm>, 2008-2009

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2010

<sup>4</sup> [http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en](http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en)

Unfortunately, while First Nations parents, Elders and community members consistently advocate for quality ECD programs and services that reflect local values, traditions and protocols to ensure that children are solidly grounded in their cultures—there remain significant gaps in services and resources.

Building on a decade of discussions, meetings and research with BC First Nations communities, the Council has now produced a background paper and draft Framework designed to fill those gaps, while supporting local decision-making and planning. In fact, the Framework will build on the energy and commitment of the dedicated people in your community who are already working to promote quality ECD.

**At this time, we ask you to join us as we finalize the First Nations ECD Framework, a collective plan of action for First Nations children.** We invite you to:

- Provide feedback on the Framework;
- Endorse the Framework with an email or letter of support; and
- Use it as a tool to advocate for quality programs in your community, or identify potential service gaps.

Once we have received feedback and direction, the final version of the Framework will be sent to First Nations leadership for ratification in fall 2010.

The information kit attached allows you to provide meaningful input without having to work through the entire Framework and accompanying background paper. The kit includes the following:

- **Framework Summary** (Also available online: [www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php](http://www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php))
- **A Backgrounder on the BC First Nations ECD Council**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**
- **Next Steps**
- **Survey** (also online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YWWJSTF>)

Please make young children in your community a priority; take a moment to read through the kit and fill out the Survey attached or online **by July 30**. Then pass along this information to others in your community. Thank you for your time and feedback. You are welcome to contact us with your questions and comments.

Respectfully,

Tyrone McNeil

On behalf of the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council

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## The BC First Nations ECD Framework

### A Summary

*For those looking for more information, the complete Framework and accompanying background paper can be found online at [www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php](http://www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php).*

#### **Vision—Healthy, culturally strong children**

Optimal, culturally-relevant opportunities for First Nations children that nurture social, emotional, physical, cognitive and cultural, linguistic and spiritual development within their families, communities and Nations.

#### **Mission**

To develop a coordinated, holistic early childhood system of programs, services, supports and resources designed to support children, parents, families, communities and Nations through collaborative and integrated approaches to planning, service delivery, governance and administration.

#### **Core Values and Beliefs**

- First Nations children are sacred gifts from the Creator.
- Each child is born with gifts.
- Children are the present and future of our families, communities and Nations.
- Caring for children is a sacred and shared responsibility.
- Parents and families are recognized as the first teachers and caregivers of their children.

#### **Guiding Principles for First Nations ECD Programs and Services**

- **Based on First Nations ways of knowing and being.** Relationships, programs, services, supports, practices, infrastructure and governance structures are anchored in First Nations knowledge.

- **Community-based and directed.** ECD programs and services are developed through a community/Nation-driven process and delivered based on the needs of First Nations communities.
- **Holistic, universal, accessible and comprehensive.**
  - Holistic:** programs and services support the social, emotional, physical, cognitive, cultural, linguistic and spiritual development of children.
  - Universal and accessible:** programs and services are accessible to every child, whether on or off reserve, or whether in an urban centre or remote community.
  - Comprehensive:** programs and services meet the diverse needs of children and their families.
- **Integrated and coordinated.** ECD legislation, regulations, standards, policies and program and service delivery structures are aligned.
- **Transparent and accountable.** Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on ECD programs and services help ensure the quality of programs and services as well as their effectiveness. They also help identify any gaps and overlaps.
- **Sustainable.** Funding for ECD programs and services is continuous and consistent over time so as to inspire the trust of parents and families, attract and retain qualified staff, and make a difference in children's lives.

### Elements of quality First Nations ECD programs and services<sup>1</sup>

- A First Nations world view
- A close, respectful relationship with the earth and its inhabitants
- Cooperative relationships that reflect teamwork, mutual assistance and sharing
- Elder involvement
- Culturally-appropriate, holistically-based curricula and assessment mechanisms
- Respect for First Nations languages
- Recognition that children's families are the primary care providers and educators
- Recognition that children must prepare for future responsibilities in the community
- The principle of inclusion; of all children, whether they have exceptional abilities or need extra support

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society

- Multi-age grouping
- Respect and regard for childcare staff
- First Nations-led research
- Applicability to all settings in which children receive care and education
- Collaborative relationships among child care providers and programs
- Accountability to First Nations parents and communities
- Compliance with regulations developed by First Nations administrative bodies

## **Goals**

The overarching goal of the Framework is to improve the lives of all BC First Nations children by supporting their healthy growth, education and development in the early years. Building upon a decade of consultations, meetings and research with BC First Nations communities, the Framework is intended to serve as a road map that will provide guidance and advice to First Nations communities, leadership and governments about the kinds of strategies and actions that are needed to develop a comprehensive, holistic system of early childhood education (ECD) programs, services and supports focused on the needs of children, from birth to school age, and their families.

There are three specific goals that will lead to improved outcomes for all BC First Nations children:

### **Goal 1:**

Increased availability, accessibility and participation in ECD programs, services and supports by children and families

Result: All First Nations children have access to quality ECD programs, services and supports.

### **Goal 2:**

Enhanced quality of ECD programs, services and supports

Result: High quality, culturally relevant ECD programs, services and supports

### **Goal 3:**

Increased integration and collaboration at all levels of a First Nations ECD system

Result: Integrated and collaborative ECD programs and services

## **Backgrounder**

### **A Brief History**

In 2007, the BC Ministry of Education released the BC Early Learning Framework, meant to benefit all BC children. First Nations representatives were concerned, however, that the Framework did not reflect First Nations perspectives, programs or services. They also noted that provincial approaches to ECD programs and services were not integrated or consistent and they called for greater coordination between funding agencies and First Nations organizations and communities.

Responding to such concerns, the BC First Nations Leadership Council endorsed the creation of the BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Council. We began work in March 2007, tasked with the development of an Early Childhood Memorandum of Understanding, a coordinated BC First Nations ECD Agenda and an Action Plan for improving the well-being of young First Nations children.

### **Our Role**

Made up of BC First Nations organizations and communities responsible for the care, education, health and wellness of First Nations children from the prenatal stage to six years old, we are a collaborative enterprise. Our members share a common purpose—to improve the lives of all BC First Nations children prenatal to six years —while respecting the mandates and expertise of each participating organization.

We are committed to working collaboratively. We are neutral, non-political and committed to consulting, engaging and advocating for the interests of First Nations children through improved communication, planning, integration and monitoring of ECD programs, services and supports. We are not a service-delivery organization.

### **Current Membership**

The following signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding agreed to work together to improve early childhood development opportunities:

- First Nations Summit
- Native Brotherhood of British Columbia
- British Columbia Aboriginal Childcare Society
- Aboriginal Head Start Association
- First Nations Education Steering Committee
- First Nations Schools Association

- Cowichan Tribes
- Hesquiaht First Nation
- Huu-ay-aht First Nation
- Gitanyow Band
- Gitsegukla Band
- Gitskan Nation
- Haida Nation
- Kwantlen First Nation
- Kwakiutl Band
- Lyackson First Nation
- Mowachat / Muchlaht
- Snuneymuxw First Nation
- Soowahlie First Nation
- Songhees First Nation
- Squamish Nation
- Sumas First Nation
- T'Sou-ke Nation

Since 2007, the First Nations ECD Council has benefited from broad participation by the following organizations:

Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC; BC Aboriginal Child Care Society; BC Assembly of First Nations; Carrier Sekani Family Services; Central Interior Partners in Aboriginal Human Resource Development; Chemainus First Nation; Coast Salish Employment and Training Society; First Nations Education Steering Committee; First Nations Health Council; First Nations Public Service; First Nations Schools Association; First Nations Summit; First Peoples Heritage, Language & Culture Council; Kamloops Indian Band; Kwakiutl Band; NE Native Advancing Society; Native Brotherhood of BC; Sauteau First Nation; Seabird Island Band; Skeena Native Development Society; Sliammin First Nation; Squamish Nation.

Additionally, a core group of members meets regularly to ensure that the First Nations ECD Council moves forward on its agenda, and includes representatives from the following organizations:

- Native Brotherhood of British Columbia
- British Columbia Aboriginal Childcare Society
- First Nations Education Steering Committee
- Kamloops Indian Band
- Squamish Nation

## **Our Goals**

- Develop mechanisms for respectful cooperation, coordination and collaboration.
- Develop a BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Agenda and Action Plan.
- Advocate and support children’s successful transition from the home to early learning and care environments.
- Coordinate and disseminate information.
- Build partnerships with First Nations communities, all levels of Government and other groups and organizations relevant to the healthy development of First Nations children.
- Identify and address gaps in the holistic approach to the healthy development of First Nations children from the prenatal stage to six years of age.
- Facilitate the coordination of integrated First Nations ECD services according to a holistic, comprehensive life-cycle model.
- Facilitate a sustained commitment to improving outcomes for BC First Nations children.
- Facilitate evaluation of the First Nations ECD system in BC.

## **Our Achievements to Date: A Timeline**

- March 2007: The First Nations ECD Council is formed and begins work on an Early Childhood Memorandum of Understanding, a coordinated BC First Nations ECD Agenda and an Action Plan for improving the wellbeing of young First Nations children.
- Spring 2009: The First Nations ECD Council enters into an agreement with the Ministry of Children and Families for the development of a First Nations ECD Strategic Framework
- Spring 2009: With funding from the BC Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, the Council sponsors the development of two key documents: an ECD Background Paper and comprehensive Framework
- November 2009: The Framework is distributed to First Nations parents, families, communities, ECD educators, caregivers, service providers, researchers, scholars and leadership for input and direction.
- March 2010: The First Nations ECD Council and its members sign the Memorandum of Understanding, formalizing their intention to work together and within their respective organizations to improve ECD opportunities for First Nations children by signing the Memorandum of Understanding.

June 2010: To ensure the Framework is truly representative and reflective of community, it is redistributed for a second round of input before finalization.

**More information:**

FNESC provides administrative support to the First Nations ECD Council. Communications should be addressed to:

Tyrone McNeil  
On behalf of the BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Council  
113 – 100 Park Royal South  
West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2  
Toll-Free in BC: 1-877-422-3672

Website	Email	Fax
<a href="http://www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php">www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php</a>	<a href="mailto:fnecdc@fnesc.ca">fnecdc@fnesc.ca</a>	(604) 925-6097

## **Early Childhood Development & the BC First Nations ECD Framework Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What does the research say about the brain and early childhood development?**

- Early childhood is a critical period in a child's life.
- The first six years of a child's life (including the prenatal stage) are crucial for providing the foundation for life-long learning and good health.
- For First Nations children, the early years are also crucial for building an identity and sense of self.
- While parents and primary caregivers play a central role in the raising of healthy children, quality ECD programs and services can support that role by helping set the foundation for health, wellbeing and academic success later in life.
- High quality ECD programs and services can make a positive difference in the lives of children who face adverse economic or social circumstances.
- ECD programs and services can also serve as sites for cultural rejuvenation, language re-vitalization and community (re)building.

### **Why is the BC First Nations ECD Framework important?**

Thanks to the dedication and hard work of individuals and organizations committed to quality early childhood development, many existing First Nations ECD programs and services are effective. But the system as a whole is not accessible to all children, it is often fragmented, uneven in quality, insufficiently funded and sometimes not adequately supported. Moreover, some programs and services are not regularly monitored and evaluated, meaning accountability is sometimes lacking and important opportunities for improvement can be missed.

A provincial First Nations ECD Framework outlines the strategies and actions needed to overcome these current challenges. It outlines in concrete terms the strategies and actions that are necessary for ensuring an enhanced and more accessible system of ECD services and programs. The Framework also advocates for policy changes that will give First Nations communities like yours control over these supports and services. Furthermore, the Framework supports local decision-making and planning and can be used as a practical tool to track and measure progress over the next five to ten years.

## **Why is my input necessary?**

The First Nations ECD Council takes its direction from First Nations communities; who have distinct local knowledge and values needed to drive change that will result in improvement of services for young children.

**We ask you to join us as we finalize the First Nations ECD Framework, a collective plan of action for First Nations children.** We invite you to:

- Provide feedback on the Framework
- Endorse the Framework with an email or letter of support
- Use it as a tool to advocate for quality programs in your community or identify potential service gaps.

## **What's next?**

The input we receive through the community engagement process will be incorporated into a final Framework document for ratification by BC First Nations leadership in the fall of 2010. The BC First Nations ECD Council will then begin to develop a detailed Action Plan to guide implementation.

## **Why is the BC First Nations ECD Council important?**

A collective voice is more effective than a solitary one at promoting an important cause, and the Council is made up of many BC First Nations organizations and communities responsible for the care, education, health and wellness of young First Nations children. We believe by working together we can bring about the changes we all want to see for our children and communities. In fact, BC First Nations have a tradition of collaboration and we have repeatedly shown the strength that comes from cooperation and joint effort.

## **What does the Memorandum of Understanding signed by Council members say?**

In March 2010, Council members formalized their support of the Council by signing the following statement:

*"It is acknowledged that Early Childhood Development is critical to the success of First Nations children in all aspects of their lives and serves as the foundation for life-long learning. We, the signatories, agree to work together, and within our respective organizations, to improve Early Childhood Development opportunities for First Nations learners."*

## **Next Steps**

### **What else can I do to support young children and their early childhood development in my community?**

By taking the time to provide your input on the provincial First Nations ECD Framework, or endorsing the Framework if you agree with it, you have taken a significant step on behalf of families and children in your community. To build upon the goals of the Framework, please consider doing the following:

#### **Make ECD a priority**

Research the best practices and key issues are around early childhood development, particularly as they relate to your own community. You will then know how far your community has come and how far it has to go.

#### **Tie funding and accountability to a community plan**

Develop a comprehensive community plan, with a clear vision and specific goals and objectives, with direct input from all segments of the community, including Elders, youth, parents and leadership. Build as much consensus as possible. And always go back to the community plan to ensure programs and services are appropriate for your community.

#### **Inform, and be informed**

Information is power. Make sure important information goes to all stakeholders in as many creative ways as possible. By the same token, make it your responsibility to stay informed on the latest research, on what other agencies and communities are doing in the area of ECD, and on government initiatives and sources of funding.

#### **Support locally-based training**

Many First Nations people have expressed concern that when community members must leave their communities to get training, they often do not return to the communities to work — representing an important loss of human resources. Through outreach partnerships with educational institutions or distance education, it is possible to secure training within your community. Support these initiatives. Your investment will help build a highly skilled team of early child care educators/teachers who are fully connected with the local community and culture.

**Create a “Champion of Children” award**

Awards have a number of values. They raise awareness of an issue. They are inspirational and motivational. And they reflect a value system; in this case, that children are a high priority in your community.

**Be a positive role model**

Lead by example. Show you care about the children in your community—show them you are fulfilling your communal responsibility—by supporting the services they need to thrive.

## First Nations ECD Framework Survey

### About the Survey

The First Nations ECD Council is seeking feedback about the draft BC First Nations Early Childhood Development Framework. Your participation is appreciated.

The goal is to ensure that this document meets the needs of BC First Nations children, parents, families, communities and Nations.

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) will summarize and share the survey responses

It is suggested that you refer to the Framework document as you write your feedback. Find it online at <http://www.fnesc.ca/e cd/e cd. php>

You can also submit feedback or endorsement by email to [fnecdc@fnesc.ca](mailto:fnecdc@fnesc.ca) or by fax to (604) 925-6097.

Responses are requested by July 30, 2010. Thank you!

### 1. What is your community's vision for children?

### 2. Does the vision statement presented in this Framework 'fit' with your community's vision for children?

**"Optimal, culturally relevant opportunities for First Nations children that nurture social, emotional, physical, cognitive and cultural, linguistic and spiritual development within their families, communities and Nations."**

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No
- Don't know / Doesn't apply

Comments:

**3. What is the same or different about your community's vision than the vision presented in this framework?**

**4. Do the following goals reflect your community's hopes and dreams for your children?**

1. Increased availability, accessibility, and participation in ECD programs, services and supports by First Nations children and families;
2. Enhanced quality of ECD programs, services and supports;
3. Increased integration and collaboration at all levels of a First Nations ECD system.

Yes

Somewhat

No

Don't know/ Doesn't apply

Comments:

**5. Would you make changes or additions to the goals presented in this Framework?**

No, they are fine

Don't know

Yes, I would make the following changes:

**6. What would you need to have in place in order to realize the goals of this Framework?**

**7. What ECD programs, services and/or supports are working well in your community?**

**8. What challenges does your community face in creating or delivering ECD services? Please choose all that apply.**

Challenge	Yes	Sometimes	No	Don't know / Doesn't apply
Communication / information sharing				
Fragmentation of services				
Funding levels				
Funding processes / proposal processes				
Government policies				
Human resources / staffing				
Support from local First Nations community				

What is the main challenge?

**9. What are the priority areas for action on ECD?**

**10. Do you think that the First Nations ECD Council should stand on its own as collaboration between Education, Health, Child Care, and other sectors/organizations, or would it fit better nested within one of these areas?**

- Stand on its own as a collaboration between Education, Health, Childcare...
- Nested just within Education
- Nested just within Health
- Nested just within Childcare
- Don't know / No opinion
- Other (please specify)

**11. Do the ideas contained in the Quality statement (page 38) 'fit' with your views and experience?**

"We, the Original Peoples of this land, know the Creator put us here. The Creator gave us laws that govern our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind. The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities. The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs. We have maintained our Freedom, our Languages, and our Traditions from time immemorial. We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed. The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination. The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation."

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No
- Don't know / Not applicable

Comments:

**12. What role (or roles) can the First Nations ECD Council play in supporting your community?**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning          | <input type="checkbox"/> Research               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Technical support | <input type="checkbox"/> Communications         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

**13. Have we missed anything? Other comments?**

Please return this by email to [fnecdc@fnesc.ca](mailto:fnecdc@fnesc.ca) or by fax to (604) 925-6097.