

June 30, 2010



First Nations Early Childhood Development Council

**Re: Share what you know about quality ECD for First Nations children:
Provide your input on the *BC First Nations Early Childhood Development
Framework***

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 develop a provincial First Nations Early Childhood Development Agenda and Action Plan for First Nations children from the prenatal stage to six years of age.

We believe quality early childhood development (ECD) programs, services and resources are vital to the health and well-being of First Nations children—and to the health and well-being of tomorrow's First Nations communities. We are aware of the research linking early brain development and experience to success later in life. Likewise, the evidence showing that ECD services and programs can yield a lifetime of benefits is now indisputable.

Young children are our priority for so many reasons. As you probably know from the research, 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 life-long learning and good health.

We respect and acknowledge the dedication of people like you who are on the frontlines of quality ECD. We also know that while your contribution is vital, there remain significant gaps in services and resources.

That's why one of the Council's initial tasks was to develop a provincial First Nations ECD Framework that could serve as a road map for the creation of a comprehensive, integrated First Nations ECD system in BC. Building on a decade of discussions, meetings and research with BC First Nations communities, the Council has now produced a draft Framework designed to enhance ECD services in First Nations communities as well as access to those services.

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.

Please help us build on your energy and commitment by providing input and direction on the Framework. Share with us what you know about quality ECD for First Nations children by July 30. That way, your input will be reflected in the formal Framework sent to First Nations leadership for ratification.

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

- **Framework Summary** (Also available online: www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php)
- **A Backgrounder on the BC First Nations ECD Council**
- **Next Steps**
- **Survey** (also online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YWWJSTF>)
- **Parent/Caregiver Handouts**
 - **A Services Checklist**
 - **Quick Facts**
 - **Next Steps**

Please take a moment to read through the kit and fill out the Survey attached or online by **July 30, 2010**. As parents, guardians and caregivers are central to any discussion about quality ECD, we are also asking that you continue to engage them in a dialogue about its benefits with the help of the parent/caregiver handouts provided.

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.

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 services¹

- 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

¹ 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 |
|--|--|----------------|
| www.fnesc.ca/ecd/ecd.php | fnecdc@fnesc.ca | (604) 925-6097 |

Next Steps

What else can I do to promote quality ECD in my community?

We recognize that, as someone on the frontlines of ECD, you are already making a significant contribution to First Nations communities. Here is a checklist of steps you might consider taking (if you have not taken them already) to build on the work you are already doing.

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, guardians, caretakers 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 community members 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.

Network with other service providers and other communities

Two heads are better than one and networking has huge advantages. There is no better way to raise the profile of your cause, share information, learn from the successes, and mistakes, of others, or to link with other agencies.

Be active

Get involved. Attend community meetings. Communicate directly to Band Councillors and Elders. It can influence the political agenda and ensure young children are a priority at every level of government.

Identify and support champions within the community

Valuable partnerships are critical for shaping and implementing change. Identify who your champions are and develop solid relationships with them through regular communication and contact.

Inform key stakeholders

Meet with the Chiefs and Councillors who hold portfolios in education, social development and health and inform them about ECD's relationship to their portfolios and its importance to their communities. They are more likely to make it a priority and support it if they understand what's at stake. Be sure to stay on top of portfolio changes and re-educate newcomers as needed.

Involve Elders

Meet with and seek the guidance of Elders, who are a valuable source of cultural knowledge and community leadership.

Develop programs through community meetings

To help ensure programs meet the specific needs of your community, hold community meetings, in which Elders, leaders, young moms and dads, parents, guardians, caregivers and youth are all invited to the table to set goals and objectives.

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 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 or by fax to (604) 925-6097.

Early Childhood Development Services Checklist

This is a tool for your community members, including parents, guardians and caregivers; we ask that you share a copy of your completed checklist with us. Please refer to page 2 for contact information.

1. Which of the following early childhood development (ECD) programs and services are you aware of in your community? *Please answer by putting a check mark in the appropriate boxes.*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Licensed Child Care/Daycare Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Babies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Nations Head Start - On-site / Outreach | <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Success by Six |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Infant Development Program | <input type="checkbox"/> StrongStart BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Supported Child Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> K3/K4/K5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal Child Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Childcare/Day Home | <input type="checkbox"/> Brighter Futures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (<i>please specify</i>) _____ | |

2. Which of the following ECD programs and services are you currently using?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Licensed Child Care/Daycare Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Babies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Nations Head Start - On-site / Outreach | <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Success by Six |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Infant Development Program | <input type="checkbox"/> StrongStart BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Supported Child Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> K3/K4/K5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal Child Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Childcare/Day Home | <input type="checkbox"/> Brighter Futures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (<i>please specify</i>) _____ | |

3. Which of the following ECD programs and services would you like to see available in your community?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Licensed Child Care/Daycare Centre | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Babies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Nations Head Start – On-site / Outreach | <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Success by Six |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Infant Development Program | <input type="checkbox"/> StrongStart BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Supported Child Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> K3/K4/K5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Maternal Child Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Childcare/Day Home | <input type="checkbox"/> Brighter Futures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ | |

4. Community name (optional): _____

Please send a copy of your completed checklist to the First Nations Early Childhood Development Council by either email or fax:

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Email | Fax |
| fnecdc@fnesc.ca | (604) 925-6097 |

The First Nations Early Childhood Development Council is a collaborative enterprise 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. 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 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.

Early Childhood Development Quick Facts

- The first six years of a child's life (including the prenatal stage) are crucial for providing the foundation for life-long learning, development and good health.
- For First Nations children, the early years are also crucial for building an identity and sense of self rooted in cultural knowledge and community; in later years, these are often associated with individual and collective wellbeing.
- While parents, guardians and caregivers play a central role in the raising of healthy children, quality ECD programs and services can support this 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 and language revitalization.
- Early childhood is one aspect of a holistic view of overall health and well-being.

Next Steps for Parents, Guardians and Caregivers

What can I do to promote quality early childhood development in my community?

As a parent, guardian and caregiver, you are already making a significant contribution as the first teacher of your children. You have the power to create change, so please think about joining the parents, guardians, caregivers, Elders and other community members who consistently speak out for quality ECD programs and services in your community. Here's how:

Be informed

Information is power. Talk to the ECD educators/teachers in your community and find out what the best practices are for ECD. Then ask yourself if you have the supports you need as a parent or caregiver.

Be active

Get involved. Attend community events. Communicate directly with Band Councillors and Elders about early childhood development within your community. You can influence the political agenda and ensure young children are a priority at every level of government.

Attend community meetings

Attend go to community meetings and voice what you need to feel supported as a parent, guardian or caregiver.

Get together with other parents, guardians and caregivers

There is no better way to raise the profile of a cause than to share information and experiences. Together with other parents, guardians and caregivers, you will have a stronger voice to advocate for quality ECD programs and services.