



The First Five Years Last a Lifetime!

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Drumheller and Area EDI Stakeholder Conversations Summary Report

Collected by

Drumheller and Area Early
Childhood Development Coalition

January 2019



Introduction

In February 2016, Early Childhood Coalitions of Alberta (ECCA) released Early Development Instrument (EDI) data to all Early Child Development (ECD) coalitions across Alberta. The Drumheller Early Childhood Development (DECD) Coalition shared the data gathered from Drumheller and Morrin schools.

To find out the story behind our results, DECD members held conversations with service providers and community stakeholders throughout the spring and summer of 2018. These conversations can help us to understand how children in Drumheller are developing as well as why, and what we can do as a whole community to support healthy outcomes for all children and their families.

The following are key themes from 4 questions that emerged through our conversations. Turn to the end page to find many of the organizations that contributed.

1. What confirmed your knowledge of how children are developing in your community? What surprised you?

Confirmed:

- Parents are spending less time face-to-face with children. More parents are working, lives are busier, and less time is being spent doing things as a family.
- Children as young as kindergarten are presenting with behavioural needs and issues.
- Service providers are observing that many children have poor fine motor skills as well as poor physical and muscular strength.
- Parents are focusing on academics (reading, writing, numeracy) instead of social and emotional development, and it's showing in their children.
- Technology is slowing child development in many key areas (physical activity, fine motor skills, social-emotional abilities).
- Older youth in our communities are more at risk of or experiencing mental health concerns (depression, anxiety) which speaks to the need for preparing and supporting children with social emotional skills in the early years.
- Lower income levels mean fewer families can access sport and recreation opportunities, and contributes to food insecurity.

Surprised:

- Many service providers were taken aback that our area of highest vulnerability was in the physical health and well-being domain.

- Several others felt the results were in line with their first-hand observations.



2. What do you know about the story behind the results?

(What are some possible causes/reasons for the results?)

Income:

- Food insecurity and poor

nutrition are real issues in Alberta, and can lead to negative outcomes for children and pregnant women.

- Transportation can be a barrier to attending services/programming.
- Many people feel ashamed to seek help and supports available in the community.
- Financial insecurity leads to stress for parents, which can make it difficult to positively parent their children.

Outdoor/Risky Play:

- Perception of danger in the community makes some parents fearful of allowing children to play outdoors
- Children are getting fewer opportunities to engage in risky play (e.g. climbing, nature exploring); this means fewer chances to build problem solving skills, physical literacy, etc.

Create Supportive Environments for ECD:

- Create healthier eating environments for children (e.g. in childcare centres, schools, in the community).
- Complete an assessment of current food environments in the community.

To begin addressing some of the ideas and concerns raised, DECD plans to do the following:

- Lunch & Learn opportunities for professionals (*Topics include: impact of technology, engaging male caregivers in programming, creating programs supportive of children with disabilities, cultural competence for service providers*)
- Parent information packages to be distributed by local obstetrician.
- Brochure displays housed at various locations where parents can find local information
- More to come...*If you have ideas or would like to be involved in planning next steps, contact Shauna at drumecd@gmail.com*

Thank you to all who participated in conversations and gave us their feedback.



Technology:

- Parents don't understand how technology use influences children.
- Children are being given technology at an early age (e.g. iPads) and therefore fewer opportunities to hold pens/pencils, make crafts, etc., which means less practice of fine motor skills.
- Children engaging with technology means fewer connections with parents and family (such as hugging/touching, reading stories, eating meals together).
- Technology is being used as a way of teaching, instead of parents directly engaging with children and teaching them.

Family Time:

- Children are eating more meals outside the home (where healthy food is not always available).
- Many children are allowed to eat meals in front of the TV.
- Children are overscheduled and are having less face-to-face time with family members.
- Child brain development is impacted in families that are experiencing trauma
- Parents are working more and spending less time at home; lives are busy. Parents are tired after working all day; there is less quality time being spent together.

Parenting:

- Parents are struggling with setting boundaries, and are unsure how to appropriately use discipline. Children are missing out on opportunities to practice self-regulation skills.

- Parents are in a rush and children aren't being given the time or opportunity to practice independence skills; parents talk for children; children aren't being given the opportunity to explore and talk about how they feel.
- There is a perception that daycare/school will take care of teaching skills and problem behaviours; parents aren't working in partnership to reinforce things taught at daycare.

Academics vs. Social Emotional:

- There is a strong societal focus on academics vs. social-emotional skills, however parents need to be teaching social-emotional skills as much as academics before entering school.
- Parents aren't aware of what they should be doing to prepare their children for kindergarten (it has changed a lot over the years)

Community Programs and Activities:

- Parents/families who need them most aren't going.
- There can be a stigma attached to attending.
- Parents aren't always aware of all that's available and going on in the community; program times sometimes don't work for families, especially those who work.



- Facebook is not always ideal for parents to find out what community events, activities, workshops are available to them. Could put up a sign (like the Century 21 sign) to post information, focusing on what's available for young children/families.

Support Professional Development of Local Professionals:

- There is interest in learning more about specific tips/tools on how to engage dads.
- Some agencies could use staff meeting time as a forum for receiving education from coalition and partners, some could attend outside training.
- Offer education about the importance of early years, 5 EDI domains, etc. There should be consistent early years curricula being implemented across childcare settings.
- Promote Power of Four program in a variety of settings so parents are aware of it.

Engaging More Stakeholders in DECD:

- Be specific in our requests when inviting stakeholders to participate in coalition meetings/projects.
- Help external community partners see themselves in the Drumheller ECD Coalition workplan and understand how they can contribute to the overall vision; it's not feasible for some partners to attend all meetings. Partners would like to stay connected in some ways where appropriate, for example events/initiatives directly linked to their work.

and the education of service providers on the subject so everyone is on the same page.

- Provide training to do Ages and Stages screening tool.
- Provide more communication about resources available in the community.
- Develop a 1-3 year action plan (what can we all do in the short-term/long-term, what will happen over the next 2 to 3 years); as a result of sharing the EDI results, what do we do next to respond to the results?

Advocacy:

- Advocate for healthier eating environments at locations where young children frequent
- Promote/advocate for health equity for all

Gaps:

- Need to know what programs/supports churches are offering for families with young children so referrals can be made where appropriate.
- Parents don't know a lot about Pre-K; schools could do a better job of telling parents what it looks like, who should go, what are the benefits, etc.

Quality ECD Information for Parents:

- It can be hard to find quality/trusted information online for parents. Coalition could produce a list (or get information to parents somehow) about what are quality sources of online information for child health and development; coalition could do the vetting.
- Explore best ways of sharing information with parents, both online and through other venues.

3. & 4. What are some strategies or actions our community and/or coalition can do to address these results?

(This includes strategies that are beyond what your group/organization can do on its own.)

Barrier Reduction:

- Offer transportation for families to programming.
- Reduce stigmas so families feel safe accessing services.
- Program staff could make a home visit first to get to know parents so they feel more comfortable attending a program for the first time (parents may feel intimidated showing up at a program by themselves; having made a personal connection previously might help them feel more comfortable).
- We need to explore why some families are isolated and don't interact with other families? How can families be around other families? What's stopping people from participating? We need to find the right motivation to get vulnerable families out to interact with others.
- Create affordable childcare.

Community Programs:

- Create greater accessibility for sports/programs, and offer more non-traditional options for programs. Design these programs with longevity, not just a short introduction.
- It can be hard for families to know whether a group/program is appropriate for their child. Add more info to brochures/calendars about age appropriateness of group,

more detailed description of group and what will happen during it, whether group is free play or structured, etc.

- Allow families to just drop in/show up to programs and events (it can be difficult to register for events).
- Have more informal (drop-in) activities in the community that are free.
- Offer organized sport/fun family sport and activities that are outdoors where families with children under 5 can show up (e.g. 4-6 pm) and participate in that activity and have fun together (e.g. soccer, etc.).
- Offer alternate times for play groups (currently most happen during a weekday; offer more evening and/or weekend play groups so working parents can participate).
- K-4 after school program to do a craft, etc.
- Big Brother/Big Sister mentoring programs – so beneficial for many parents who are working, single parented homes, etc.
- Extra-curricular activities for children to engage with other children.
- Get parents engaged in activities where social/emotional development skills can be modelled for parents.

Parent Education:

- Workshops that address the needs of blended family, same sex partners, divorced and single-parented homes, etc.
- Promote “Dad and Me” programs in a way that includes other important male figures in a child’s life (e.g. grandpa, uncle, male mentor) to reach families where a Dad is uninvolved.

- Partnership between school and DECD to do evening education/information sharing sessions with parents.
- Family info nights, do a group activity and learn about healthy eating.
- Education information/material for parents to include in monthly newsletters already being sent out by various service providers/schools (one snippet take away/small notes).
- Provide more education that parents need to focus on the early years to prevent problems later on.
- Social Emotional Learning.
- Start at the hospital with parents – education of parents begins when baby is born; parent programs and Public Health to teach/encourage importance of early years and the payoff, importance of talking to your baby, etc.
- Nutrition and healthy foods, adequate sleep, and social-emotional skills all need to be taught to children before kindergarten (in addition to practicing sounds, fine motor development, cutting, reading, basic parenting skills).

Collaboration between Partners:

- Connect and strategize to address needs.
- Project REACH can offer PD opportunities to train school support staff/community agencies.
- Think outside the box; rebrand how we reach people/families – “It takes a community to raise children”.
- More collaboration between service providers – consistent understanding and messaging of early development, its role