

Parenting Education and Support Report and Recommendations

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For the
The Greater Victoria Early Childhood Community Coalition

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Executive Summary

The following report and recommendations is a accumulation of two years of work by the Greater Victoria Early Childhood Community Coalition, and the task group working specifically on the issue of parenting knowledge and skills needed by parents in Greater Victoria. We drew on national research from Invest in Kids, local knowledge of the coalition members, local research such as the Early Development Indicator and Mapping project, and a collection of information from parents, and from providers.

The direction of the recommendations supports the national and international research that emphasizes the need for parenting knowledge and skills for ALL parents, and the need for supports and programs to be available to parents in all communities. We also respond to the important message that this can only happen when multiple sectors and community work together to provide parents with the support they need to be the best they can be in their essential role as the most influential aspect of their child's developmental outcomes.

We therefore provide these recommendations to Funders, decision makers, our coalition members and the community. We believe that funding and in kind resources from multiple sources, directed at the goals in the recommendations can make a difference for parents, and therefore for the positive outcomes for the over 14,000 young children in our region.

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Preface

The Greater Victoria Early Childhood Coalition is a group of individuals and agencies who share a strong commitment to supporting early childhood development. Members of the Coalition have diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The Coalition includes parents and grandparents, representatives of non-governmental organizations, independent professionals, provincial government representatives, and local health authority representatives and school. The Coalition's work is coordinated by a Leadership Council.

The foundation document of the Greater Victoria Early Childhood Community Coalition is its Community Charter. The Coalition's mission includes the development of a Community Plan to promote the multiple factors that contribute to the health and well-being of young children. The Community Plan rests, in part, on the results of research by Dr. Clyde Hertzman. That research involved administering the Early Development Instrument – the EDI – to young children in the Greater Victoria area.¹ The EDI results have been used to create a series of maps that illustrate children's scores neighbourhood by neighbourhood. The Hertzman research is often spoken of as the "mapping review."² The Community Plan also reflects the experience, insights, and practical knowledge of the Coalition members and Guiding Principles, endorsed by the Coalition as essential elements of any initiatives to promote young children's optimal development. Programs and services designed to promote early childhood development ought to be:

- Accessible – to all children in the community, including exceptional children and the children of newcomers;
- Affordable – including services of equal quality for all economic groups; and
- Available – when and where families need them, within their own neighbourhoods.

The Coalition has accepted the view of "optimal child development" used in Dr. Hertzman's research and embedded in the EDI. The focus of the Coalition's Community Plan is to strive to remove the barriers that prevent young children from accessing the generic community-based programs and services that promote development in the areas identified as important by the EDI. The EDI measures these facets of children's development:

¹ The EDI assessments of Kindergarten children in all 4 of the Greater Victoria region's school districts were completed in January, 2003.

² The Early Development Indicator is an outcome measure expressed as readiness to learn at Kindergarten. For more information about the Early Development Indicator see www.earlylearning.ubc.ca. The Greater Victoria community summary can be found at http://ecdportal.help.ubc.ca/pubMaps/CommSummaries/pdf/SD61_62_63_64_Summary.pdf

- physical health and well-being;
- social competence;
- emotional maturity;
- language and cognitive development; and
- communication skills and general knowledge.

Using the mapping review, community planning meetings, and the Guiding Principles, the Coalition identified the following 12 themes which we felt essential to a community plan :

1. Child care
2. Knowledge and awareness of early childhood development
3. Parenting education and support
4. Safe environments
5. Neighbourhood cohesion
6. Food security and a nutrition-friendly community
7. Housing
8. Child-friendly workplaces and communities
9. Health care and developmental/health screening
10. Partnerships
11. Promoting learning including through literacy
12. Media including all technological influences over children³

Coalition members formed groups to address three immediate priorities they felt they could make a difference in within the following year. These priorities were Community Awareness, Parenting Education and support, and Childcare. The Parent Education and Support Task Group have been addressing a topic high on the list of priorities, as ranked by the Coalition. Although the Task Group membership has changed somewhat since its inception, there has been considerable continuity with a core of long-term members.

This report summarizes the work of the Parenting Education and Support Task Group, makes recommendations to funders, planners, and decision-makers, and suggests next steps.

Why Focus on Parenting Education and Support?

Children’s development is impacted by their unique characteristics, by the circumstances of their families, by the neighbourhoods in which they live, and by more encompassing social factors and conditions.

At community planning meetings, Coalition members identified “parenting education and support” as one of the top three priorities for immediate action in Greater Victoria.

³ Greater Victoria Early Childhood Coalition (2004). *Summary of the coalition community plan – May, 2004*. Victoria, BC: unpublished draft document.

Parent education is the process of acquiring specific knowledge and skills to parents and caregivers with the objective of enhancing child's health and development. Parent support is to help parents and other caregivers develop and use social, psychological and material resources to enhance the parenting capabilities of themselves and their families. It is difficult to separate these two components when looking at our priority. Our members believe:

- Parents have the greatest influence on child development in all domains – physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.
- Parenting style strongly influences outcomes for young children.
- All parents need information, services, and support from the community to help their children reach their full potential.

Parenting Education and Support Opportunities in Greater Victoria

One of the first initiatives of the Parenting Education and Support Task Group was the commissioning of research to find answers to these questions:

- Where are parents currently accessing parenting information, programs, and services?
- What information, programs, and services do parents want and need?
- How and from whom would parents prefer to receive parenting and/or child development information?

The questions were answered by consultants who conducted a series of focus groups with parents across the region.⁴ A total of 8 focus groups, each consisting of 6 parents, were conducted throughout Greater Victoria, including one group on Salt Spring Island.

The Task Group's second initiative was to develop a comprehensive inventory of the opportunities that exist in our region for parents to become skilled and knowledgeable about parenting. A search was undertaken for programs and services that deliver parenting education and support as a primary goal. The results are summarized in Appendix A. **It is important to recognize that formal parenting programs are only one means of providing parents with information and skills needed for effective parenting.** Parents have named for example, childcare providers and teachers as an important source of parenting information and support, while the programs primary goal is care and education of the children. There are many other examples of this in our community.

In addition to this local research, the Task Group drew on Canadian parenting research, Early Development Indicator results and Statistics Canada information.

⁴ Magellan Research (2004).

Quantifying the Need

We gathered data on numbers of children under the age of 5 in part to assess the adequacy of existing parenting education programs. While it is recognized that parent education and support are both important, for the purposes of getting a clear picture of programs and services we have in our communities, the agencies that provided parenting education as a primary goal were the focus.

The following table shows the distribution of the 14,195 children under 5 (2001) in the municipalities of Greater Victoria. It is noted that there were 3216 births in 2002 and most parents with children under the age of six are employed (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2000). It is also important to note that some Greater Victoria neighbourhoods have the highest mobility rates in the country. In neighbourhoods with high mobility, informal supports for parents are less likely to be established and sources of formal support less likely to be known to parents.

Municipality	Number of Children under 5	Percent of CRD under 5 (rounded to the nearest 100th)
Saanich	4520	31.84
Victoria	2575	18.14
Langford	1260	8.88
Colwood	935	6.59
Esquimalt	800	5.63
Central Saanich	640	4.51
Oak Bay	580	4.08
Gulf Islands	495	3.49
Sooke	490	3.45
Sidney	450	3.17
View Royal	345	2.43
North Saanich	330	2.32
Juan de Fuca EA	210	1.48
Metchosin	160	1.13
Highlands	85	.60

What Does the National Research Say About Parenting Knowledge and Skills?

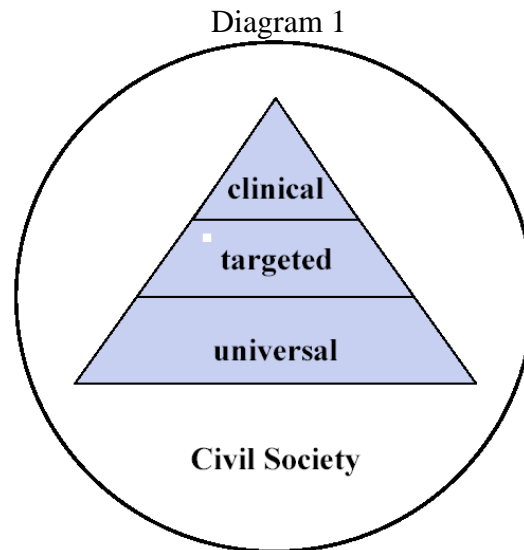
- In order to increase their children’s readiness for school, and to help their children develop pro-social behaviours, and improve their children’s health outcomes, all parents need parenting knowledge, skills, and support.⁵ However, the value of pursuing parenting information and support is not well recognized.

⁵ McCain, M. & F. Mustard (1999). *Early years study*. Toronto, ON: Children’s Secretariat.

- Fewer than half of Canadian parents are knowledgeable about providing sensitive, stimulating environments for their young children.⁶
- Only 43% of the parents report feeling confident in their parenting skills. This includes all parents, regardless of education level, income, or age.⁷
- A high level of information-seeking in parents does not correlate with greater knowledge or confidence.⁷ The Task Group members believe this may be due to lack of support and follow-up after parents receive new information. Information alone does not always change behaviour.
- There is limited research into the effectiveness of parenting programs. Two programs in our region report doing evaluations of parent outcomes. Many programs report parent satisfaction.

A Model for Providing Information and Support to Parents

For the purposes of categorizing programs, sources of parenting information, and sources of support, we have adopted the model used by Hertzman (2004):



Explanation of the Model

The publicly-funded sources of support available to parents can be classified as “Universal,” Targeted,” or “Clinical.”

⁶ Invest in Kids , A National Survey of Parents of Young Children, April, 2002

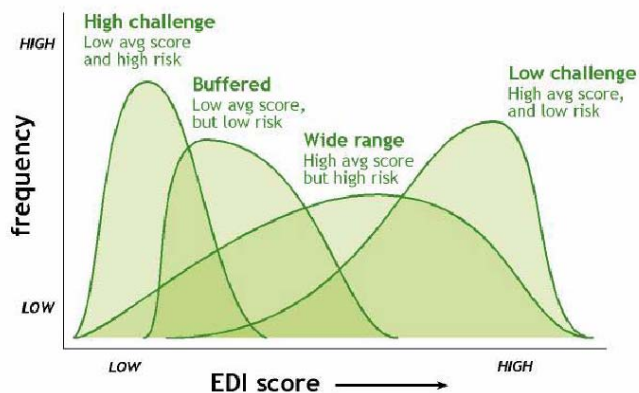
⁷ Invest in Kids, A National Survey of Parents of Young Children, April 2002, pg 108

- Universal programs, sources of information, and support are intended to be accessed by all parents. In order to be truly universal, the program or service must be perceived as “for all parents.” Universal points of access include health care (public health programs, family doctors), schools, libraries, recreation centres, workplaces, and in some communities, neighborhood houses. While universal programs are beneficial in all neighborhoods, only by breaking down barriers to access can they benefit all parents. If barriers are present, they increase the gaps in benefits available to children (Hertzman, 2004). Barriers to access are listed in Appendix B.
- Targeted programs and services are intended for parents whose children have social or biological risk factors that could negatively impact their development.
- Clinical programs treat or intervene when difficulties have been identified.

All three types of support are surrounded by additional sources of information and services that are delivered via the institutions of civil society – the non-profit, voluntary, charitable organizations and informal networks of support that exist at the community level.

Hertzman suggests that the ideal mix of supports for each community will depend on the characteristics of the neighbourhoods that are reflected in by the EDI (Early Development Indicator). Diagram 2 (Hertzman, 2004) shows examples of ways in which communities may vary.

Diagram 2



In all four types of neighbourhoods, there is a need for universal, targeted, and clinical supports.

In high challenge neighbourhoods, Hertzman recommends an “increased” emphasis on universal supports and supports offered within civil society, while a “special” emphasis is recommended for targeted supports.

In buffered neighbourhoods, Hertzman recommends an “increased” emphasis on universal supports and supports offered within civil society.

In wide range neighbourhoods, Hertzman recommends an “increased” emphasis on targeted supports and “special” emphasis on supports offered within civil society.

In low challenge neighbourhoods, Hertzman recommends an “increased” emphasis on universal supports.

It is noteworthy that the mapping review does not specify programs or support services. It simply recommends types of support needing “increased” or “special” emphasis.

Results of Research using Focus Groups of Local Parents

As reported above, the Parenting Education and Support Task Group commissioned research to find answers to these questions:

- Where are parents currently accessing parenting information, programs, and services?
- What information, programs, and services do parents want and need?
- How and from whom would parents prefer to receive parenting and/or child development information?

The focus groups provided the following information:

- Parents reported being most aware of public health units, recreation centres and neighbourhood houses as community sources of parenting information. (It is noted, however, that fewer than half of the parents were aware of neighbourhood houses and their resources.)
- Parents identified other parents as a critical source of information.
- Parents expressed a preference for group-based resources as they benefit from the knowledge and experience of other parents like themselves.
- *Island Parent Magazine* is considered an important source of parenting information. Nearly all participants said they read this free publication.
- Books are a common reference for pregnancy. Parents reported their thirst for knowledge to be insatiable as they prepared for childbirth.
- Some parents were using Web sites, toll-free services (BC NurseLine, Dial-A-Dietician), and television.

- Parents reported that early childhood educators in preschools were good sources of information about child development.
- Parents reported getting some of their best information and support from other parents, child care staff, preschools, and family members. These more informal opportunities are clearly not amenable to documentation and tracking.
- Parents said they would like more information on these topics:
 - Positive discipline;
 - Behavioural issues (temper tantrums, sibling rivalry, bullying);
 - Unbiased information about health issues like circumcision and immunization;
 - Different parenting styles;
 - How to co-parent and blended families;
 - Helping children with separation or divorce;
 - Child safety;
 - How to answer “big” questions such as “Am I going to die?”; and
 - What parents can do to facilitate cognitive development and emotional balance.
- According to parents, most of the community programs are designed for parents with children under 3 (or even under 2) and they wanted more for ages 3 – 5, when social/emotional and behavioural issues become more challenging to parents.

Existing Sources of Parenting Education and Support

Our search for programs and resources currently in place produced an inventory of over 100 programs. See Appendix A for the Mindmap. **It is recognized that this is not likely a comprehensive list of the programs in the region, due to the dynamic nature of programs and the limitations of the study, however they are a reasonable place to start.** It is recommended that the profile continue to evolve based on the information provided by the community. The programs are categorized as Targeted (e.g. for teenage parents, for parents whose children have special needs, for families identified as being at risk) or Universal (registration needed and no registration required). The existing patchwork of programs reaches only a fraction of parents of young children in the Greater Victoria area.

Targeted Programs for Some Parents

There are over 50 different parenting education and support programs intended for families identified as being at biological or social risk. Combined, these programs reach an estimated 1000 families a year. Some, but not all, programs and services record numbers of participants. In programs that do not record numbers, such as drop-in

programs, estimates were made. Service providers believe that clients who are socially “at risk” often use a number of targeted programs. Therefore, the total number of families being served is imprecise and “generous.”

Universal Programs for All Parents

- Many of the programs are designed for mothers and their babies or toddlers. Only the parenting education component of co-op preschools and other programs that address children of all ages provide information about preschoolers (2- to 5-year-olds).
- Other than Public Health, programs are often viewed as neighbourhood-specific.
- It is clear that the following two services reach the greatest number of families:
 - Prevention Services of the Health Region provides parent information and support to 88% of mothers with babies through “Baby Talk” drop-in. (It is noted, however, that Baby Talk (1.5 hours/week) is limited to parents with babies under 6 months and it is not offered in all neighbourhoods.)
 - The Health Region also sees 70% of children in their health clinics at 2, 4, 6, 12, and 18 months. (It is noted that these encounters are brief and limited in time according to the immunization schedule.)
- There are 19 programs reported to be available to any parent that were structured enough to require registration. These programs register an estimated 1400 families (a small fraction of the families with young children). Some programs run at capacity, while others have difficulty recruiting parents to attend.
- There are 11 organizations providing drop-in programs that do not require registration. Families are not tracked. Providers report some families attend only once, some regularly attend and some attend more than one program at different locations.

Summary and Recommendations

The Task Group found that many children in Greater Victoria are entering Kindergarten lacking “readiness” in the domains measured by the EDI:

- physical health and well-being;
- social competence
- emotional maturity;
- language and cognitive development; and
- communication skills and general knowledge.

The mapping review illustrates that children’s development varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood across the Greater Victoria region.

Our inventory of existing programs and sources of support for parents found a number of both Universal and Targeted programs, sources of information, and sources of support. Participation data suggest that, with two exceptions (Baby Talk and health clinics for infants), these services are reaching small numbers and small percentages of parents with young children. The absence of reliable research makes it impossible to comment with confidence on the quality or effectiveness of most existing programs.

The parents who participated in the focus groups identified topics about which they would like to learn more. They noted the need for programs, information, and support specifically for families with toddlers and preschool-aged children.

Recommendations for Funders and Decision makers

The Task Group believes significant improvements can be made in the delivery of information and the provision of support for parents. We encourage funders, planners, and decision-makers in all sectors that impact early childhood development to consider the following recommendations:

Expanding and Developing Education and Support opportunities for parents

1. Increase parents' access to a wider range of universal parenting information, programs, and types of support by:
 - a. Using universal points of access (including, but not limited to, schools, recreation centres, libraries, work places, health clinics, and community centres)
 - b. Expanding the numbers and types of services and sources of parenting information and child development information available to parents
 - c. Reducing barriers to access, including, but not limited to, financial barriers
 - d. Creating a continuum of support opportunities for parents of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, kindergarten-aged children, and school-age children
 - e. Focusing initially on increasing the opportunities and options available to parents of toddlers and preschool-aged children
2. Maximize collaboration and build on what currently exists by:
 - a. Supporting partnerships among the community's service providers
 - b. Connecting with and involving the Greater Victoria Early Childhood Community Coalition
 - c. Complementing the work of the Coalition's other Task Groups and the work of Success by Six
3. Reach out to greater numbers of families by:
 - a. Identifying and addressing barriers families encounter in accessing child development information and support
 - b. Providing information on topics requested by parents

- c. Using delivery formats and schedules that suit parents
4. Develop initiatives that disseminate to parents the findings of current research related to child development, including, for example:
 - Authoritative parenting
 - Parental attunement
 - Language development
 - Brain development
 - Environments and practices that support healthy child development
 - Developmental milestones
5. Include evaluation components when developing new programs or supports for parents. Use the evaluation data to inform revisions and allow developers to increase the effectiveness and value of the programs or supports to Greater Victoria parents.

Build parents' awareness of ways in which they can support their children's healthy development by:

1. Initiating a poster campaign to spread information about things parents can do to promote their children's healthy development. The posters will be displayed throughout the Greater Victoria area in public places frequented by parents. The Greater Victoria Early Childhood Community Coalition has posters that are currently being used for this initiative.
2. Developing a hard copy and on-line community directory of all formal and informal programs, resources, sources of child development information, sources of support for parents, and sources of care and learning opportunities for young children in the Greater Victoria area. The directory should explain the benefits of participation in the available programs and the value children derive from play and informal activities at recreation centers, parks, and at home.

Next Steps for the Parenting Education Task Group

➤ The Parenting Education and Support Task Group will develop a plan and take action to communicate its work and recommendations to:

- Success by Six
- Ministry for Child and Family Development
- Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Recreation departments
- Municipalities of Greater Victoria
- School Districts and Independent Schools in Greater Victoria
- Coalition members

- Appendix A

Inventory of Sources of Parenting Information and Support

Appendix B

Barriers to Access (Clyde Hertzman, 2003)

1. Program not there
2. Costs too much
3. Transportation
4. Time offered
5. Language
6. Fragmentation
7. Lack of information
8. Conflicting expectations
9. Social distance
10. Parental consciousness