



Six Community Priorities Early Childhood Development Plan for the Central Okanagan



More Access to Stable and Affordable Child Care Options

Participants in all of the Central Okanagan workshops identified the need for improvements to child care in their communities. These improvements included suggestions for a comprehensive, universal and adequately funded child care plan. The need to ensure decent wages for the providers of child care was also discussed, as was the need for more early childhood educator spaces in post secondary educational institutions. The discussion around child care also included suggestions for more support to be provided to parents who choose to care for their children at home and who utilize more informal support networks. There was a general feeling that the community lacked awareness of the importance of child care and the value of having affordable, accessible and high quality child care options.



The Development of Central Places in the Community Dedicated to Meeting the Needs of Young Children and Their Caregivers

There was consistent support throughout the workshops for identifiable and accessible places in the community where the needs of young children and their caregivers could be met. They were alternately described as “hubs” or “centres” and had the following characteristics:

- Neighborhood based, open, accessible
- Holistic and family oriented
- One-stop for all or most needs
- Easy to get to, convenient hours, friendly and open
- Focused on skill development, providing resources and social networking opportunities (i.e., connectedness)
- Culturally sensitive
- Free or low cost services, including physicians, naturopaths, midwives, other health care providers, prenatal classes, parenting support and other skill development, toy library, recreation equipment lending, standardized programming, couples support, and outreach services

Some of the participants suggested Community Centres as possible locations in their neighborhoods, while others discussed the use of schools for after-hours drop-in.



More Recreational Opportunities for Young Children and Their Caregivers

There was support for the development of diverse recreational opportunities that are age appropriate and can be easily accessed. Participants felt that they could make better use of existing facilities if they were more appropriate for young children and had programs focused on their needs. There was a feeling that existing facilities could be improved or expanded to meet the demand. Participants also suggested that the recreational opportunities needed to be free or low cost.



Civic Planning that Enhances the Liveability and Inclusiveness of Our Communities

Many of those who participated in the workshops felt that their communities were not as livable or inclusive as they could be, especially in terms of meeting the needs of young children and their caregivers. They felt that communities lacked green space and/or safe routes to and from green space. Play areas could be improved and expanded. Many participants commented on the lack of sidewalks in some neighborhoods as a barrier to the mobility of young children and their caregivers. Children's needs could be considered in community planning and in new real estate developments. Many of those who participated felt that they wanted more opportunities to build their community through cooperative activities with their neighbours and with other families of young children.



More Support for Vulnerable Families, including Support for Lone Parents, Young Parents and Fathers

The need to support vulnerable families in our communities was a consistent theme in all of the workshops. This included providing adequate support to single caregivers and young caregivers as well as providing support to men in their parenting role. Participants suggested more outreach and working to ensure that the financial needs of families are met. Although some of these needs could be met within the context of central community service sites (i.e., hubs or centres), particular attention needs to be paid to the challenges faced by those who may be more vulnerable.



Educating the Community about the Critical Importance of the Early Years (Conception to Age 6)

The importance of raising awareness with members of the general public was discussed many times throughout the workshops. Many participants conveyed their belief that raising children is not the sole responsibility of parents. They also suggested that by engaging in educational activities, raising public awareness and accessing the media, all community members could be informed about the importance of the early years of life. A strong message from the workshops is that through educating the community and creating awareness, we will be able to contribute to the following outcomes:

- prevent vulnerabilities
- create change in the negative attitudes and behaviour toward children evident in our community
- reduce parenting stigma
- help to promote family friendly workplace policies and in turn build a friendlier and safer place in which to raise young children

