



UNDERSTANDING THE EARLY YEARS  
WEST KOOTENAY  
**COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN**  
2010 - 2012

Presented by  
**Understanding the Early Years West Kootenay &  
Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative**



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## ACRONYM LIST:

There are many acronyms used in the early childhood sector and the region which appear throughout this document. The list below is provided for reference.

- CAPC:** Community Action Programs for Children
- CBAL:** Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy
- CBT:** Columbia Basin Trust
- CCRR:** Child Care Resource and Referral
- CPNP:** Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs
- ECD:** Early Childhood Development
- ECE:** Early Childhood Educator
- ECEBC:** Early Childhood Educators of B. C.
- EDI:** Early Development Instrument
- GIS:** Geographic Information Systems (mapping software)
- HELP:** Human Early Learning Partnership
- HRSDC:** Human Resources and Social Development Canada
- IDP:** Infant Development Program
- IHA:** Interior Health Authority
- KBCSC:** Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative
- LCAFN:** Lower Columbia All First Nations
- LNR:** License Not Required Child Care
- MCFD:** Ministry of Children and Family Development
- PIDACS:** Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey
- POP:** Pregnancy Outreach Program
- PT/OT:** Physiotherapy Therapy/Occupational Therapy
- SES:** Socio-economic Status
- SCDP:** Supported Child Development Program
- TLF:** Talking Little Feet Aboriginal Early Childhood Council
- UEY:** Understanding the Early Years

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a three year research project funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada ( HRSDC). This initiative is designed to increase knowledge about child development, to monitor society's progress in improving outcomes for young children, and to catalyze community action. The West Kootenay region of British Columbia participated in the UEY project from 2007 to 2010. The Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative ( KBCSC) was the host organization and the Early Years Office was responsible for the implementation of the UEY project. The **Community Action Plan** represents the culmination of the project and presents six recommendations for future action.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

Many individuals and organizations in the West Kootenay region understand the importance of the early years and work to improve outcomes for children and families. Amongst the participants at the UEY Research Forum, the theme of collaboration was integral, reflecting the belief that "Growing Our Kids" is the responsibility of the whole community. Stakeholders wanted to see future actions take place within existing structures and that limited resources be used wisely to strengthen relationships. Although many issues affecting children and families are impacted by decisions made at the provincial and federal levels, much can be done within regions and communities.

The following six recommendations represent a blue print for action called for by UEY project stakeholders and adopted by the West Kootenay Early Years Council ( formerly West Kootenay Success by 6 Council of Partners)

1. Take action to create additional and affordable child care spaces.
2. Strengthen and support coordinated efforts at the community and regional level.
3. Strengthen Partnerships
4. Build on and strengthen existing services for families
5. Connect with non-traditional partners
6. Consider the special characteristics of the region.

The Community Action Plan identifies the WHAT and WHO for each recommendation and a series of next steps recognizing a link between services to children and families and annual EDI research released by HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership UBC).

Accompanying the next steps is an invitation to stakeholders to identify their role and work plan for contributing to the Community Action Plan, and how they will coordinate their efforts with other partners.

*Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.* - Arthur Ashe

## INTRODUCTION:

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a three year research project funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). This national research initiative is designed to increase knowledge about child development, to monitor progress as a society in improving outcomes for young children, and to catalyze community action.

The West Kootenay region of south central British Columbia participated in the UEY project from 2007 to 2010. In the West Kootenay region the host organization for the project was the Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative (KBCSC). The Co-op's Early Years Office took responsibility for the administration and implementation of the project.

Based on research and feedback gathered throughout the project, the **Community Action Plan** presents a set of six recommendations for future action. The delivery of the Community Action Plan represents the culmination of the Understanding the Early Years West Kootenay project.

## BACKGROUND:

The West Kootenay region encompasses a broad geographic area in south central British Columbia. The population of the region is approximately 62,000 people who are widely dispersed in communities of varying size.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 4,000 children were in the age group six years and under.<sup>2</sup> The size of communities ranges from urban (cities of Nelson, Castlegar and Trail) to small towns and villages (Kaslo, Nakusp, Salmo, and Slocan) to very rural (Slocan Valley, Kootenay Lake, and Arrow Lakes). Due to population and economies of scale, major services tend to be concentrated in the urban centres. Families living in the more remote areas have limited access to services and are faced with challenging and sometimes costly travel.

A major component of the UEY project was the gathering and analysis of several pieces of local research. Each piece of research contributed different information that collectively painted a picture of the well-being of young children and families in the region. Together the following research documents provided the context for the Community Action Plan:

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada Census, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada Census, 2006

- **UEY Community Mapping Report:** This report contains detailed socio-economic characteristics of West Kootenay families in the region. The locations of child and family programs and services are also provided. The full report and Executive Summary are available at [www.wkearlyyears.ca](http://www.wkearlyyears.ca) .
- **Community ECD Directory:** This online directory describes information about the range of programs and services for children and families in the region. The directory and supporting website are maintained by the Early Years office of KBCSC, which serves a coordinating function for a number of initiatives in the region, including Success By 6, Children First and UEY. This directory is available at [www.successby6wk.com](http://www.successby6wk.com).
- **Early Development Instrument (EDI):** The characteristics of kindergarten children living in the West Kootenay region were assessed and described as part of the UEY project through the implementation of the EDI in School Districts 8, 10 and 20. EDI results can be accessed at [www.wkearlyyears.ca](http://www.wkearlyyears.ca) .
- **Community Research Report:** This report captures the results of the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessment of Children Study (PIDACS) which was conducted in 2008-2009. This voluntary study provides further information about kindergarten aged children and their parents.
- **ECD Evaluation Report:** This study was conducted in the spring of 2009 and assessed the effectiveness of Early Childhood Development (ECD) coalitions in British Columbia. The results have informed the ECD coalitions (commonly referred to as “tables” or “councils” in the West Kootenay region) with regard to their level of community engagement and mobilization. It is available at [www.wkearlyyears.ca](http://www.wkearlyyears.ca) .



Judy Pollard explains PIDACS results to Forum participants.

## THE PROCESS:

The development of the **Community Action Plan** has involved a number of steps and many partners. The Early Years office of KBCSC has led the process; however the work would not have been possible without assistance from community members throughout the region.

### Step 1:

In order to inform project partners and stakeholders about the local research results, information was disseminated to the community in a variety of ways. Many of the documents described in the previous section were distributed by and to community members, such as ECD professionals, business leaders, elected officials, ECD tables, parents, public health partners, aboriginal representatives, Childcare Resource and Referral (CCRR) centres, early childhood intervention programs, literacy organizations, school district representatives and so on. Presentations were made to key stakeholders, such as the Success By 6 Council of Partners. As well, regular updates on the project were provided in the West Kootenay Family magazine (distributed to 24,000 households in the area three times a year.)

### Step 2:

The second step involved hosting the **Early Years Research Forum** February 26 and 27, 2010. The research forum, called “*Growing Our Kids*” was held in two locations over two days, with 75 participants; 50 on February 26 in Castlegar and 25 on February 27 in Nelson. The format of the Forum involved the presentation of research results in the morning followed by facilitated discussion in the afternoon.



Nelson Forum participants in discussion.

The **15 x 15 Policy Framework**, available at [www.earlylearning.ubc.ca](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca), was used as a starting point to provide direction for the discussions. At this time, community members were invited to share their suggestions for what should be included in the action plan. The forum also included a Friday evening “Showcase” of community-based initiatives and a celebration of the great work being done in the region, with Canadian family entertainer Fred Penner delivering a key note address.

### Step 3:

The results of the Forum discussions were summarized and collated, with the intent of identifying themes which could be addressed in the **Community Action Plan**. The set of recommendations which follows emerged from the analysis of the work of the forum.

#### **Step 4:**

A final step in the process was the validating of the recommendations by community members. A draft version of this plan was circulated to forum participants, ECD table members, the KBCSC Early Childhood Advisory Committee, parents, Aboriginal partners, and other key stakeholders for feedback and revision before the final version was produced. Written comments were collected using a feedback form, and the Early Years Coordinator attended meetings of eight of the community ECD tables to gather in-person responses. Overall, there was consistent support for the six recommendations. Several respondents added suggestions to the lists of who should be taking actions, and actions were clarified and expanded on. A re-ordering of the recommendations was a final improvement.

### **SIX RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Overall, there was a sense that the West Kootenay region already has many individuals and organizations familiar with the importance of the early years and engaged in trying to improve outcomes for families and children. Given the economic climate in the province of BC in 2010, many of the suggested actions focused on working within existing structures, using resources wisely, and strengthening relationships as opposed to undertaking any new initiatives.

A consistent message was the importance of collaboration, reflecting the belief that “Growing Our Kids” is the responsibility of the whole community. There was also an acknowledgement that although work can be done in the region, many of the issues are impacted by external factors and/or decisions made at the provincial or federal level.

The following six recommendations represent key areas of action called for by project stakeholders.



Famous dad Fred Penner entertains at the Early Years Showcase.

# 1 Take action to create additional and affordable child care spaces.

There was a clear message about the critical need for more child care in the West Kootenay region. Data in the Community Mapping Report and the PIDACS confirmed what many community members already knew – the number of child care spaces in the region is inadequate to meet the demand. There is also a challenge with affordability of child care options. It was recognized that this is not just a local or even regional phenomenon, and that work to solve the problem must occur at many levels.

*“Vulnerable children need access to quality affordable care for when they need it (7 am, 2 pm or 6 pm).”  
Forum Participant.*

Several areas requiring attention were mentioned:

- Wages and benefits for early childhood educators are insufficient resulting in high turnover and long term staff vacancies
- The need for after school child care, out-of-school care and child care for parents working shifts is an enormous challenge for working families
- The need for infant and toddler spaces is growing
- The need for ongoing support for family child care and LNR providers

**ACTION:** Advocate for better support for good quality child care options.

**WHO:** ECE professionals, Early Years office, parents, ECD table coordinators, ECEBC, Child Care Advocates of BC, Canadian Child Care Advocacy Association, KBCSC, government leaders, business community



Young children enjoying lunch together.

**ACTION:** Support the development of child care spaces.

**WHO:** CCRR's, government leaders, child care centre directors, early childhood educators

*“You must do the things you think you cannot do.” Eleanor Roosevelt*

## 2 Strengthen and support coordinated efforts at the regional level.

One of the biggest challenges facing the region at this time is the question of how services are best coordinated. With limited resources, and looming reductions to funding, it becomes even more important to focus on a system that will maximize resources, improve efficacy, and reduce duplication.

Over the past three years, the Early Years office of KBCSC has played a lead role in coordinating services, supported by funding from the UEY project, Success By 6 and Children First. This coordinating role has included providing support to eight community-based ECD tables, the regional Talking Little Feet table, and to the Success By 6 Council of Partners, as well as the provision of regional services such as a magazine, a conference, and a website. As the UEY project wraps up, and funding from other sources is reduced, it will be important to ensure that the regional coordinating function is not lost.

Participants at the Forum clearly saw a role for a coordinating body of some kind, with a regional focus and an ability to respond to issues and to apply for funding at the regional level. To address this need, there was strong support for the idea of expanding the role of the existing Success By 6 Council of Partners to become a West Kootenay Early Years Council with a broader mandate.

*“The education and early years systems need to connect and work as a team on behalf of the children. Make it about the kids – not about us.” Forum Participant.*

**ACTION:** Restructure the West Kootenay Success By 6 Council of Partners to a West Kootenay Early Years Council which will provide regional, coordinated advice and support to the Early Years Office.

**WHO:** Early Years Office, KBCSC, Council of Partners members, Success By 6 partners (United Way, Credit Unions), ECD table coordinators

There was also clear support for continuing the Early Years office within the KBCSC, and for the concept of maintaining a clearinghouse/resource sharing function. The importance of the ECD tables as part of the early years network was also acknowledged, along with the need to continue supporting their work.

- ACTION:** Continue to provide regional, coordinated support and services to Early Years initiatives and the ECD tables
- WHO:** Early Years Office, KBCSC, Council of Partners, ECD table coordinators, Success By 6, MCFD (Children First)

Evaluation forms from the Forum indicated that participants from around the region benefitted from the opportunity to connect, share information and build new relationships. Many mentioned that they had learned about others working in the field they had not known about before and that they would like to have such an opportunity again.



Early years professionals connecting during a training event.

- ACTION:** Host regional events where information sharing and networking can continue, such as a follow-up forum or a session at an Early Years conference.
- WHO:** Early Years Office, community members

### 3 Strengthen partnerships.

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the discussions was the need for School District staff and Early Childhood Educators (ECE) to connect and work together more effectively. This is particularly important in light of the fact that the province of BC is implementing full-day kindergarten, which will affect both child care providers and schools. There was a strong suggestion that more emphasis should be placed on preparing schools to be ready for children rather than children being ready for kindergarten or “ready to learn”.

*“Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”*  
*Vincent Van Gogh*

**ACTION:** Conduct joint professional development for ECEs and kindergarten teachers.

**WHO:** KBCSC Early Years Office and school district Early Learning Consultants

**ACTION:** Develop a mechanism to maintain ongoing collaboration between educators and care providers, both locally and regionally. This could include site visits, joint activities, shared projects and learning.

**WHO:** School district representatives, Early Years Office, child care directors, school principals, early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers,

A second area where increased collaboration was seen as needed was with Interior Health. Public Health staff could be more connected to hospitals, doulas, midwives, lactation consultants, and others (such as child care centres) working to provide support for pregnant and new mothers.

**ACTION:** Strengthen the link between public health service providers and early years service providers, through participation in ECD tables and networking during joint activities

**WHO:** Public health nurses, consultants, nutritionists, ECE professionals, parents, CCRRs, CAPC, CPNP, CBAL, ECD table coordinators

It was made clear that in order for this increased collaboration to occur, support from the upper management level of Interior Health will be required so that public health staff can participate as part of their workload.

**ACTION:** Provide support for coordinated service delivery and community participation. Conduct joint programs and training.

**WHO:** IHA management and community partners

A third area where partnerships and information sharing were seen as important was with provincial level groups who are working on behalf of the early years sector, lobbying government and raising awareness, such as the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), BC First Call and Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC).

**ACTION:** Ensure the local community is kept apprised of the work of provincial groups working for improvements to the early years community through bulletins, website, magazine, signing on to appropriate list-serves and becoming members of First Call and ECEBC.

**WHO:** Early Years office, Community members

## 4 Build on and strengthen existing services for families.

Discussions revealed that there is already a wide spectrum of services available to parents and children in the West Kootenay region. However, a frequent comment was the shortage of programs targeted specifically at fathers. Existing programs and services should be made more dad-friendly, and additional opportunities should be provided.



The “Dad’s Manual” is a popular resource developed through the UEY project.

**ACTION:** Create parent support groups for expecting/new dads, mentoring programs for dads, and more dad-friendly resources such as the “Dad’s Manual”. Make existing programs more dad-friendly.

**WHO:** Service providers, ECD tables, early childhood programs, StrongStart Centres, IDP, public health staff, CAPC, CPNP, Aboriginal Family Services, CBAL, Family Resource Centres, Early Years Office

There was a lot of discussion around the need to address areas of vulnerability in the EDI results, especially in the area of Emotional Development, the domain where the greatest vulnerabilities were found in the region. Although many supports exist, there is clearly a need to increase efforts.

**ACTION:** Continue to provide resources in a wide range of formats and methods, including the West Kootenay Family magazine, booklets, courses, newsletters, websites, workshops, Traditional Parenting programs (Aboriginal), and drop in programs.

**WHO:** StrongStart Centres, CCRRs, Family Resource Programs, nursery schools, child care centres, CBAL, ECD tables, Early Years Office, public health, CAPC, CPNP, Aboriginal Family Services, MCFD

Another issue which surfaced several times was the need for community “hubs”, especially in the rural areas. Parents and caregivers would benefit from having better access to services in one easy to reach place. Aboriginal families would benefit from having a more centralized service delivery method.



The “Grandpa & Granny” Connections Box helps to strengthen Aboriginal children’s awareness of their culture.

**ACTION:** Support existing hubs (such as family resource programs) and advocate for additional hubs to be developed (possibly utilizing schools and childcare centres)

**WHO:** Family support workers, family resource centre staff, child care providers, school staff, parents, municipal government, CBAL, Talking Little Feet Council

Finally, there was recognition that although the early years sector has a key role to play in supporting families, the solutions to many of the issues facing low income parents (lack of affordable housing, limited public transportation, and hunger), cannot be solved by the early years sector alone. Action and energy from this sector needs to be directed towards supporting other individuals and agencies working towards solutions for these issues.

**ACTION:** Support existing efforts to address poverty-related concerns, such as Living Wage initiatives, calls for a provincial Child Poverty Strategy, and specific responses to political announcements

**WHO:** Community members, voters, government leaders, regional food bank programs, affordable housing initiatives, social planning networks, KBCSC, Lower Columbia All First Nations

*“If you don’t like the way the world is, you change it. You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time.” Marian Wright*

## 5 Connect with non-traditional partners.

A frequent comment at the Forum was the need to engage members of the community other than those already involved. Early childhood professionals need to be connecting more with the business sector and decision-makers at the policy level to help them understand the issues and how they can be part of the solution.

“Action - whether it be local, provincial or federal – needs to be grounded in communities; launched by a group of like-minded people who care deeply about the same issues. A successful community initiative will bring to the table not only those who are committed to early childhood development, but also people who have a variety of skills, a breadth of community knowledge, differing perspectives, and specialized abilities.” p. 60, *Creating Communities for Young Children – A Toolkit for Change*, produced by HELP (2009).

**ACTION:** Using the Family Friendly Business resources package, bring the message of the importance of the early years and family friendly business practices to the business community.

**WHO:** Early Years Office, ECD tables, provincial Success By 6 office, business partners (Chambers of Commerce, Community Chests)

**ACTION:** Using the Family Friendly Business Awards, publicly acknowledge supportive businesses.

**WHO:** Early Years office, community members as nominators, business partners

**ACTION:** Communicate key messages through print media, radio interviews, social media (eg. Facebook, Twitter), presentations, and special announcements.

**WHO:** Early Years Office, ECE professionals, business partners

Participants at the Forum indicated that reaching out to connect with other sectors would likely be more successful if those in the early years field were more skilled in communication techniques. More training in working with the media and how to get the message across was suggested.

“Public awareness has improved, affecting many different parts of children’s and families’ lives”. Forum Participant.

- ACTION:** Train ECE professionals in practical skills to work with the media.
- WHO:** Early Years Office (include sessions at Early Years conference), instructors in the ECE college program

## 6 Consider the special characteristics of the region.

Although the UEY project generated and interpreted a great deal of data, community members felt that certain aspects of the West Kootenay region were not well addressed through the generalized federal scope of the project.

- There is a high percentage of home-schooling and alternate schooling occurring in the region, and many families in these categories would not have been included in the PIDACS or EDI results.
- There are segments of the West Kootenay population who have chosen alternative lifestyles (such as the voluntary simplicity movement), supporting an underground economy and participating in activities outside the mainstream which may not be captured in traditional data collection.
- There is no Aboriginal reserve within the region, nor is there a central location or gathering point such as a friendship centre. There is a high percentage of people with Aboriginal heritage who do not self-identify, and therefore reaching and including this population can be challenging.
- There is a need to gather additional data to better reflect the characteristics of the region and to improve planning.



The beautiful West Kootenay region.

Other organizations in the region, such as the Columbia Basin Trust and Selkirk College, have also been engaged in gathering data about the West Kootenay. Ongoing data collection could be more coordinated and broader in scope if all the partners worked together, and this could help address some of the gaps in the existing research.

**ACTION:** Partner with other projects and initiatives to include information on the “hard to reach” members of the population

**WHO:** KBCSC, Columbia Basin Trust, Selkirk College, School Districts, Home Schooling associations, Aboriginal service providers

**ACTION:** With support of community partners, collate regular data updates, ideally linking with Stats Can and other information providers’ cycles

**WHO:** KBCSC, Columbia Basin Trust, Selkirk College, municipal governments, regional governments

## **NEXT STEPS:**

In order for the plan to be implemented, and successful in the long term, some important next steps will need to occur.

- Renaming and restructuring of the current West Kootenay Success By 6 Council of Partners into the new West Kootenay Early Years Council.
- Prepare the public launch of the Community Action Plan through the media, presentations to government leaders, funders, the business community, and local ECD champions as well as distribution through a wide variety of regional networks.
- Educate and engage the groups and individuals identified in the plan.
- Develop support for the Plan with the community ECD tables and their members.
- Review the Plan on a regular and ongoing basis.
- Seek additional resources and funding to support actions identified in the plan.
- Develop a research schedule to ensure stakeholders have access to current information to support decision making.

*“It’s important to know that words don’t move mountains. Work, exacting work moves mountains.”*

*Daniilo Dolci*

