

# VALUING OUR CHILDREN: VALUING OUR CHILDREN:

Taking  
Taking

First Steps  
First Steps

Together  
Together



Executive Summary

Surrey/White Rock Make Children First - May 2004

# Introduction

**Surrey/White Rock Make Children First** is a community partnership focused on the health, well-being and learning of children during their first six years of life i.e. the period of human development known as Early Childhood Development or ECD. We are committed to working collaboratively to create caring, healthy, safe, vibrant communities for young children and their families and to develop the necessary ECD supports and services that promote positive outcomes for young children and their families.

Over the past year, the group has benefited from the expertise and involvement of representatives from 42 different organizations, as we assessed the research, heard from over 600 families, compiled information about existing ECD services in Surrey and White Rock, and reviewed demographic and school readiness information. Our report "**Valuing Our Children: Taking First Steps Together**" stands as a first blueprint for action on early childhood development for the Surrey and White Rock area.

Thank you for taking the time to read this executive summary. Copies of the longer report are available by contacting Surrey Social Futures 604-594-7644 or [ssf@paralynx.com](mailto:ssf@paralynx.com) or, by downloading the report from [www.vcn.bc.ca/ssf](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/ssf)

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**on behalf of Surrey/White Rock Make Children First**

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# Why is Early Childhood Development so important?

New brain development research has put the spotlight on the early childhood years. We now know that during the first six years of life, the daily interactions and experiences of a child have profound impacts on his/her long-term healthy development, behavior, and learning potential. Young children who experience good health, loving care, positive relationships, and play-based, language enriched learning prior to school entry, are at a distinct advantage and have increased chances of lifelong success.

Across the globe, politicians, policy-makers, economists, financiers and educators are taking notice for three key reasons:

- **Spiraling costs of remedial and crisis interventions in healthcare, education, social services, and the justice system need to be brought under control.** Economic studies have proven that investments in ECD supports and services for young children and their families, effectively address preventable conditions and can significantly reduce the need for later expensive interventions
- **The future of the Canadian economy depends upon having a highly educated, innovative workforce.** Studies show that children entering school ready to learn are far more likely to achieve high school graduation and continue on to post secondary education
- **Our economy now relies upon the participation of mothers in the paid labour force to increase the purchasing power and economic security of their families.** The lack of public supports for good quality, affordable childcare is adversely affecting children's early experiences, readiness for school and their future contributions as leaders of tomorrow; it also is creating undue stress and financial hardship for families

## Did You Know?

- Over 30,085 children under the age of six years live in Surrey and White Rock. Over 68% of mothers with children under the age of six are participating in the paid workforce
- As of 2003, children under the age of six living in Surrey/White Rock outnumbered those living in Vancouver. The local birth rate continues to be significantly higher than the provincial average. Projections indicate that within the next 5 to 7 years, Surrey and White Rock combined will have over 15% of BC's young children (2002 - 11.8%)
- School District 36 now has the largest kindergarten enrollment in BC (4,412 in 2003/04) and the number of ESL kindergarten children is approximately 40%
- 35.3% of those living in Surrey and 13.9% in White Rock have a mother tongue other than English or French. Approximately 10% of Surrey's new immigrants are under the age of six, when they arrive
- 18.3% of Surrey households and 11.1% of White Rock households live below the federal low-income cut-off line. In Whalley, over 27% of households are living in poverty (family of four living in Surrey earning less than \$26,469 in after-tax dollars, is considered to be below the poverty line)
- 39% of B.C.'s children who are under the age of six and in the "care and protection" of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, live in Surrey

## The Good News... The Bad News....

- **Approximately 80% of our children in Surrey and White Rock are doing well.** They are healthy and come from stable families who have the capacity to support the growth and development of their children. These families have the skills and knowledge to access the resources and services they need
- **At least 20% of young children from across the socio-economic spectrum are NOT doing as well as they should, and in some parts of Surrey there are deep pockets of need.** The reasons are many – health problems, nutrition/dental concerns, disability issues, lack of parenting skills, lack of caregiver consistency, sense of isolation, lack of informal family and neighbourhood supports, literacy issues, language and cultural barriers, lack of availability of appropriate services, financial stress, poverty, transportation challenges, mental health concerns, substance abuse, domestic violence or a combination of some or all of these barriers
- **Development of ECD services, appropriate amenity space, and the necessary public transit to ensure access, are NOT keeping pace with population growth**
- **ECD services have historically been under-funded by the provincial government.** In 2002, only \$1,368 per child was spent on ECD versus education funding of over \$6,000 per child. The data clearly suggests that on a per capita basis, Surrey and White Rock are NOT receiving their fair share of the ECD dollars

## What's Working? What's Not?

- Surrey has some valuable ECD assets such as playgrounds, recreation programs, public libraries, public health units, kindergarten programs and childcare programs
- In the past two years, through funding from Success By 6 and Children First, there has been some growth in ECD services like family resource programs and outreach services to isolated families
- Interest in ECD is steadily growing and ECD organizations are exploring innovative partnerships

However, a closer look reveals:

### Structural Concerns

- Existing ECD supports and services are not planned or funded as an integrated system, so discovering what is offered, who is eligible, the costs, the hours of operation and the location, are major undertakings
- The actual capacity of the ECD services does not begin to meet the needs, particularly in areas where there are large numbers of children (Whalley, Newton, Guildford) or in areas experiencing substantial growth (Cloverdale and Fleetwood)
- Public amenity space suitable for ECD programming is hard to find and often not affordable. Location of ECD programs is thus driven by the availability of space rather than the proximity to the families who need the service. In many neighbourhoods where the support of a full day kindergarten program is most needed, local schools have insufficient space so eligible children are being turned away
- Funding for ECD is extremely limited; it has to be managed from multiple sources and it is often time limited. As a result many ECD service providers are forced to spend inordinate amounts of administrative time simply trying to keep the doors of their programs open

### **Serious Access Issues**

- Access barriers (particularly cost, transportation and language barriers) prevent the children and families who would benefit the most, from using the existing ECD services
- Outreach approaches focused on isolated children and families, are still under-developed

### **Limited range of ECD Services**

- Supports for parents during the prenatal, infant and toddler years are inadequate
- The lack of good quality, affordable childcare and the recent cutbacks in the provincial childcare subsidies for low income families are causing undue stress on families and caregivers. The ratio of full-day regulated daycare spaces to children aged 0-6 years is only 1 space: 15 children. Fees can be as high as \$840.00 per month for an infant or toddler
- Drop-in family resource programs are available in only a few neighbourhoods
- More early literacy and school readiness initiatives are needed, especially in high need neighbourhoods
- For families with children with developmental delays and disabilities, there are some excellent 'early intervention' programs in place, however long waitlists for assessment and therapy are becoming commonplace
- There are no mental health supports focused specifically on young children who are exhibiting behavioural challenges and disorders; estimates indicate 1 in 7 children require significant support

## Taking "First Steps": What needs to be done?

- To address the structural, access and service delivery issues identified above, **Surrey/White Rock Make Children First** has developed the following "First Steps" as integral to our ECD action plan:

### *Step 1: Embrace a Collective Vision*

- A community where all young children can live, learn, play and dream in safe, healthy surroundings, knowing they are loved by their families and valued by the broader community
- A community that understands the fundamental importance of the first six years of life to later health, well-being, learning and success, and knows that in order to support children, we must support and respect parents and other caregivers of young children
- A community that ensures all parents of young children have access to the necessary financial resources, supports, skills, information and services to meet the basic needs of their children for food, housing, clothing, healthcare, education, childcare and transportation
- A community that acknowledges its shared responsibility for supporting and investing in young children, and works together with families to create a better future

## Step 2: Take Collective Action

- Establish Surrey and White Rock as “child friendly” communities and encourage the active involvement in “child friendly” initiatives by business, labour, local government, public agencies, philanthropic groups, community organizations, faith groups, cultural groups and neighbourhood associations
- Raise public awareness about the lifelong importance of the early years and advocate for the removal of barriers which limit parents’ abilities to meet their children’s basic needs
- Co-ordinate the ECD planning and funding roles of the Fraser Health Authority, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (Fraser Region), School District 36, City of Surrey, City of White Rock and Success By 6® to ensure existing and new resources are effectively used
- Improve access to and knowledge about existing community resources, supports, skills, information and services available for young children and their families by:
  - developing a centralized information/referral service which will assist parents seeking ECD services
  - implementing outreach strategies that connect isolated families to existing services
  - supporting initiatives that effectively address access barriers e.g. the mobile child-minding project, development of neighbourhood based services
- Build a stable, adequately resourced network of community supports and services which are culturally appropriate, strengthen families, and ensure that children acquire the early skills and confidence to interact with peers and adults outside their family circle. Priorities include:
  - increasing screening/assessment capacity to ensure the early identification of developmental difficulties
  - expanding and supporting neighbourhood based family resource programming
  - building capacity and strength through literacy and school readiness initiatives
  - advocating for and finding opportunities to expand and support affordable, high quality childcare, especially infant and toddler care
- Address those gaps that research indicates will significantly improve the quality of life for our most vulnerable young children and families by:
  - supporting new initiatives that enhance the capacity of new parents and encourage strong bonding with their child e.g. the Maxxine Wright Place Project (a high risk pregnancy and early parenting project) and Learning Together (support program for teen parents)
  - strengthening the services for children with special needs and addressing assessment and therapy waitlists
  - exploring ways to develop preschool mental health supports for children with behavioral challenges and disorders and providing ECD staff with the appropriate consultation and training

### Step 3: Measure and Build upon Success

- Ensure that all ECD planning, project development and program delivery undertaken in Surrey and White Rock is research informed and outcome based
- Regularly use assessment tools like the Early Development Instrument (EDI) as a way to measure how successfully we, as a community, are supporting young children's healthy development, well-being and school readiness

## A Call To Action

Due to new residential and commercial developments, changing demographics, immigrant settlement patterns and slightly lower real estate prices, Surrey and White Rock are both experiencing change and growth. Surrey in particular, is a challenging community for young families because of its large size, poor public transit system, relatively undeveloped ECD service infrastructure and its marginal sense of community and lack of neighbourhood support. Young children living in 'multi-barriered' families are especially vulnerable. Meantime White Rock's young families can feel lost in a community that has a strong seniors' focus.

**Surrey/White Rock Make Children First** calls upon businesses, labour, City of Surrey, City of White Rock, Fraser Health, School District 36, senior levels of government, community organizations, faith groups, cultural groups, residents, families and the philanthropic community to come together and embark upon the "First Steps" action plan.

Together we can help children thrive. "It takes a community to raise a child".

## End Notes

### 1. Research References

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- Mental Health Plan for Children and Youth, Ministry of Health, British Columbia

### 2. Demographic Information

- Statistics Canada 2001 Census Canada
- BC Statistics, Ministry of Management Services
- School District projections 2003/04
- Ministry of Children and Family Development Statistics quoted in Maxxine Wright Report Nov 2003

### 3. Assessment of Children's Overall Developmental Status

- Derived from preliminary results of the 2003 EDI school readiness results compiled by HELP at UBC. Final results are due September 2004 and will provide more fine detailed information about the extent of the "deep pockets of need".

### 4. ECD funding versus education funding analysis

- Information taken from the 2002/03 Program Expenditure Summary, B.C.'s Annual Report on Early Childhood Development 2002/03 and figures derived from 2002/03 School District Budget Allocations, Ministry of Education