



# Early Intervention: An Early Parent /Child Development Framework for British Columbia

A Social Innovation Discussion Paper\*

Parenting Matters

**The earlier the investment, the greater the return on investment**

*James J. Heckman, Nobel Laureate Economist, December 2010, Chicago*

\* A Social Innovation Discussion Paper designed to provoke thought, discussion, creativity, and action.

## EARLY INTERVENTION

### **An Early Parent /Child Development Framework for British Columbia**

has been developed and endorsed by the BC Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP-BC) February 2011

## BC Association of Family Resource Programs Board of Directors

MICHELE HUCUL | The Bridge Youth and Family Services, Kelowna

MIMI HUDSON | Family Services of the North Shore, North Vancouver

MARY JOHNSTON | Eastside Family Place, Vancouver

SUE KHAZAIE | Abbotsford Community Services, Abbotsford

JANICE LAMBERT | Richmond Family Place, Richmond

NICKY LOGINS | Sooke Family Resource Society, Sooke

ANNETTE MORGAN | Dze L K'ant Friendship Centre, Smithers

JACQUIE NELIGAN | Ladysmith Family and Friends, Ladysmith

ANN PELTIER | Terrace Family Place, Terrace

JOYCE WHITE | Child and Family Services to Kwumut Lelum, Nanaimo

Thank you to all who contributed to the development of this Discussion Paper.

## BC ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS

The BC Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP-BC) is a provincial not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting families and strengthening communities by providing advocacy and leadership to community-based Family Resources Programs (FRPs).

There are 268 neighbourhood based FRPs located in 89 communities throughout the province that serve thousands of vulnerable BC families annually. Over the past 35 years, FRPs have become recognized for their holistic approach in addressing the needs of families with young children. FRPs provide support through five core researched based services: Family Support, Play-based Learning, Early Learning and Literacy, Parent Education and Learning, and Information and Referrals. FRPs connect families, reduce vulnerabilities and serve as a gateway to a network of family and child development services.

## PURPOSE

To identify and recognize parents as the definitive factor to ensuring their children are ready for learning and life.

## AN EARLY START

*“Parents have the most important influence on a child’s development in the early years.”*

McCain & Mustard, Early Years Study: Reversing The Real Brain Drain, 1999

*“Sensitive, responsive parenting is the single most important benefit children can receive during their early years.”*

J. Douglas Willms, Vulnerable Children, 2002

### Sooke Family Resource Society

*“A young 15 year old teen who was 3 months pregnant and living on the streets in Victoria came into our Family Resource Program for support. When she walked in the door we discovered she was a Meth addict and extremely down and out. Today, with the support of our FRP and counselling staff she is doing well, attending college and a responsible mother of a 3 year-old child.”*

*Parents are their children's first and most important teachers... and their first and most important nurses, coaches, safety officers, nutritionists and moral guides. They also are their children's first and most important advocates and care coordinators. Most parents, most of the time, are able to fill these roles, identifying and coordinating appropriate, affordable services for their children. But there remain far too many instances where parents cannot find or afford the health, education and social services their children need, or the services they locate do not actually meet the children's needs. And there are far too many children whose parents are not able to fulfill the advocacy and care coordination roles without help.*

Charles Bruner, PhD, What Young Children and their Families Need for School Readiness and Success, 2010

## EARLY INVESTMENTS

Researchers agree that it is imperative to make financial investments in supporting vulnerable children at their most opportune time of life; the first six years.

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) reports that, *"Children's well-being cannot be separated from their families. While a close relationship with a warm and nurturing teacher can have very beneficial results, it is the family (for better or worse) which will continue to have the greatest influence upon the child for his or her whole life. Therefore, good public policy will concern itself with family matters."*<sup>1</sup> The timing of early supports to parents and their children is crucial to the well-being of our society.

*Parents and their capabilities with respect to caring for and nurturing young children are important to early childhood development. In turn, as children grow into youths and adults, their lives are vitally affected by their childhood experiences. Education of parents and potential parents so that they are better able to perform that role is key to helping their children avoid growing into a life of crime.*<sup>2</sup>

Dave Park, Economist Emeritus, Vancouver Board of Trade, 2010

## The Future of Children, USA

*Child maltreatment, the most extreme outcome of poor parenting, seriously impairs the mental health and disrupts the development of children. But research shows that parenting that is problematic without reaching the level of maltreatment can also lead to seriously negative educational and mental health outcomes for children.*

R. Barth & R. Haskins, (2009) Will Parent Training Reduce Abuse, Enhance Development, and Save Money? Let's Find Out, Policy Brief 2

1 FRP Canada, forthcoming

2 Dave Park, (2010) Economic Aspects of the Development and Prevention of Criminality Among Children and Youth, A Sequel to the Kids 'N Crime Report, p15

A current paper, **Supporting Families Will Save Money Now and in the Future**, being disseminated across the United Kingdom by the national organization, Parenting UK states, *“Parenting UK is aware that many parenting support roles are under threat. We would urge you to consider the cost benefits of supporting parents when setting budgets and commissioning. Roles such as parent support advisors and parenting experts provide a vital link to parents, often spotting problems early and so saving money in the long run. Society cannot afford to ignore the crucial role parents play in their child’s future.”*<sup>3</sup>

In **The Early Years Study: Reversing the Real Brain Drain**, (1999) Margaret McCain and Fraser Mustard, examine how negative experiences in the early years results in long lasting effects that are difficult to overcome later in life, *“Early deprivation of social interaction, such as contacts with a mother, may lead to mental disturbances that have their counterparts in actual structural abnormalities in the brain.”*<sup>4</sup>

Infancy and early childhood is the first and most critical phase of human development. Children supported in their early years by their parents leads to adulthood with increased productivity, higher income, better health, greater family investment, upward mobility and reduced social costs.

## Parenting UK Core Principles

- \* Parenting UK supports a model which promotes respectful and empowering attitudes and which values parents’ unique knowledge of their own children.
- \* Bringing up children should be seen in the wider context of health, employment, housing, family income, and support services, and non-parental care.
- \* Parenting is both a continuous process starting before parenthood and continuing through birth and school to grandparenthood, and an interactive process concerned with the development of the whole person.

<sup>3</sup> Parenting UK, 2010, Supporting Families Will Save Money Now and in the Future

<sup>4</sup> McCain & Mustard, 1999, Early Years Study: Reversing the Real Brain Drain

## ECONOMIC & SOCIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS

In North America and throughout the world economic and social discussions are focusing on upstream solutions that direct early investments towards children's best start in life. Concurrently, there is a shift in the field of child maltreatment towards early prevention work with families. Insights into child abuse risk factors have inspired several promising strategies designed to prevent child abuse and neglect. Research is showing that targeted services are not as effective as broad based community resources. Daro and Dodge report in the **Future of Children Journal, Preventing Child Maltreatment** (2009), *"Attention is shifting toward creating environments that facilitate a parent's ability to do the right thing. The most sophisticated and widely used community prevention programs emphasize the reciprocal interplay between individual-family behaviour and broader neighbourhood, community and cultural contexts."*<sup>5</sup>

Nobel laureate economist, James Heckman asserts that parent-coaching and high-quality early child development programs focused from birth to age 5 produce a higher per-dollar return than K-12 schooling and later job training. They reduce deficits by reducing the need for special education and remediation, and by cutting juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy and dropout rates. Heckman's research underscores that parents are a large part of the financial solution. *"Direct investment in the child's early development is complemented by investments in parents and in family environments."*<sup>6</sup> He attributes the widening gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged to deficits in skills and abilities that begin with a child's inadequate early childhood development. Heckman contends, *"The earlier the investment, the greater the return on investment."*<sup>7</sup>

Heckman's sentiment has been echoed in BC through the recent **Kids N Crime Report** and its sequel, **Economic Aspects of the Development and Prevention of Criminality Among Children and Youth**, Dave Park, Research Associate and Economist Emeritus, 2010, promoted by The Vancouver Board of Trade and the Justice Institute of BC, outlines the

### United Way of the Lower Mainland (UWLM)

*"Family resource centres in rural communities exist despite all odds. They are under resourced and often held together by sheer determination."*

*Administrators are constantly looking to different funding streams and expanded partnerships to meet the ever growing needs of families with young children.*

*They are an integral part of the continuum of early childhood development (ECD) services.*

*I can't count how many times I had parents say things to me like, "I don't know what I would do without the Family Place" or "I am a better parent because of the Family Place."*

*I do not hesitate to fully endorse the work of this vital and essential organization."*

Kim Adamson,  
Provincial Manager,  
Success By 6, UWLM

<sup>5</sup> D. Daro & K. Dodge, (2009) The Future of Children, Preventing Child Maltreatment Fal Journal, Creating Community Responsibility for Child Protection: Possibilities and Challenges, Volume 19, Number 2

<sup>6/7</sup> James J. Heckman, (2010) Reduce Deficits and Strengthen the Economy: Invest in Early Childhood Development

economic impacts, *“Investing in disadvantaged young children has a high economic return.”*<sup>8</sup>

FRP Canada further reports, *“Longitudinal studies from the U.S. provide substantial evidence of the positive effects of early school entry programs for disadvantaged children. However, the effectiveness of these carefully designed programs is due, at least in part, to the fact that extensive supports for parents were provided in conjunction with educational programming for children. The fledgling early learning and care programs in Canada have not incorporated family support elements to anywhere near the same degree as these exemplary programs. Therefore, we cannot expect early learning and care programs on their own to achieve the same positive results as the landmark preschool programs which generated the evidence being used as their justification.”*<sup>9</sup>

Several jurisdictions in Canada have expanded their investments in Early Child Development, including the development of Early Years Centres in Ontario, Parent Link Centres in Alberta<sup>10</sup> and Family Resource Centres in Newfoundland & Labrador. In all three of these jurisdictions they have been influenced by the principles and research based evidence of early intervention and support for children and families.

Newfoundland & Labrador has integrated an investment in Family Support Programs into their child poverty reduction strategy.

In Alberta, the Parent Link Centres provide a comprehensive range of services delivered through four core areas:

- 1) Parent Education;
- 2) Early Childhood Development and Care;
- 3) Family Support, and;
- 4) Information and Referral Services.

*This referenced document can be found on the BC Association of Family Resource Programs’ website at [www.frpbc.ca](http://www.frpbc.ca).*

<sup>8</sup> Dave Park, (2010) Economic Aspects of the Development and Prevention of Criminality Among Children and Youth, A Sequel to the Kids ‘N Crime Report

<sup>9</sup> FRP Canada (forthcoming)

<sup>10</sup> Alberta Children’s Services (September 2004) Parent Links: A network of resource centres serving parents, caregivers and children in Alberta.

Alberta Children’s Services (October 2005) Parent Link Centre Initiative Logic Model

## Little Drum Consulting

*“It has been a privilege to collaborate with a non- Aboriginal organization (FRP-BC) who is working hard to ensure the Aboriginal children, families and communities feel respected, valued, and welcome in their programs.”*

Monique Gray Smith, Founder/  
Consultant,  
Little Drum Consulting

Alberta's model is based on the research of McCain & Mustard's, Early Years Study along with Family Support America and FRP Canada. Through this investment the Alberta Government has developed a social infrastructure capable of delivering research based parenting and child development programs as they become available. Parent Link Centres are able to demonstrate skills development in parents through medium term outcome measurements. These well resourced hubs deliver consistent unified early childhood and family development services for Alberta families.

The investment in Parent Link Centres presents an ideal model with similar population and geographic characteristics for BC to consider.

BC Family Resource Programs and the proposed Early Intervention Framework mirror the core services of Alberta's Parent Link Centres. Family Resource Programs are grounded in the belief that consistent positive parenting practices and secure, healthy parent/child relationships are fundamental factors in all aspects of healthy child development.

*The family support sector is frequently prioritized by local leaders as a critical investment area, thus acknowledging the central role it plays in supporting a socially and economically diverse population of families. UWLM sees clear linkages between local research, community-based strategic planning, the prioritizing of FRPs for investment of resources, and the achievement of short, intermediate and long term outcomes related to young children. With such clarity UWLM remains confident in this work as a sound investment for our Children 0-6.*

*Jeff Calbick, Director, Strategic Priorities, Community Impact and Investment.*

*Alison Bledsoe, Planner, United Way of the Lower Mainland, Letter of Support.*

## A Parents Journey

*"My son and I were regular participants of a Family Resource Program. I was 9 months pregnant. Then the unthinkable happened and my sweet son was still born. I was dreading going back as I knew I would have to share my story. But I worried for nothing. The staff and other parents gave me the strength and compassion I needed. It became a safe place for me to go. They knew why I was sad some days. In the last two years this program has helped me through a lot of struggles related to a loss of a child, a subsequent pregnancy and raising a toddler. That alone makes this family resource program beyond valuable, and needed, to me."*

## STRONG SAFE AND SUPPORTED

The government of British Columbia is currently transforming support to BC's most vulnerable population through two important Government initiatives: Strong Safe and Supported and the Child & Family Support Assessment Planning and Practice Plans (CAPP). These transitions have potential synergies with the existing principles and practises embedded in Family Resource Programs. Family Resource Programs provide prevention services that strengthen families and communities, decrease vulnerabilities, increase resiliency and improve the well-being and healthy development of children. They provide early intervention supports that prevent family breakdown, gather social supports, reduce and hopefully eliminate the need for children to be removed from their parents.

BC Family Resource Programs work to support the provinces most vulnerable families. One of the ways they do this is by integrating existing federal initiatives, Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Programs (CPNP). In addition, Family Resource Programs work with local health departments, immigrant serving agencies, Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Aboriginal Head Start Programs (AHS), food security initiatives, Infant Development Programs (IDP), Pregnancy Outreach Programs (POP) and Supported Child Development Programs.

**The Early Intervention Framework provides a structure to enable Family Resource Programs to deliver a continuum of support, education and health promotion services through a coordinated and consistent approach. The Early Intervention Framework will ensure that vulnerable families receive the information and support they need to achieve positive outcomes for their children. Outcomes to: reduce vulnerabilities, reduce instances of child maltreatment, increase school readiness and mitigate child poverty.**

### Vanier Institute of the Family

*The care of children in Canada remains the primary responsibility and work of parents. Even in families where the children receive supplemental care while their parent(s) work or study, the children spend most of their time in the care of their parents. Moreover, it is parents who must find and organize non-parental childcare arrangements, and who are "on-call" around the clock.*

(1998)

In recent years the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, have collaborated on the development of StrongStart Early Learning Centres which are intended to provide an early learning niche and ensure that a *“greater proportion of children will enter school with optimal health and development, ready for success in kindergarten”*.<sup>11</sup>

Although StrongStart Centres understand the role of parents and the importance of parental engagement and daily reading, they do not have the mandate or capacity to address the more significant issues impacting children’s early learning. Family Resource Programs believe that parents create the environment for early learning. This includes a complex mix of family functioning conditions comprised of parenting style, parent education level, economic conditions, etc. *“Regular parental engagement, daily reading and non punitive discipline impacts children’s development”* NLSCY Findings.

## Eastside Family Place

*A foster mom looking for resources found neighbourhood support through our FRP. Over the course of several years attending the FRP she fostered many children. “I thank family place every day for being a home away from home for me and all my children, foster and adopted.”*

*She adopted one of her foster children, a two week old infant. “The help from the staff was informative and just being able to talk to experienced parents was invaluable, in fact it was a lifesaver for me as an older parent.”*

*A few years later, one of her foster children was adopted by another family attending our FRP. “After many conversations with the mom and her husband, they applied to adopt my foster daughter. We met regularly over the course of a year at Eastside Family Place and in May, my foster daughter became their adopted daughter.”*

*Our Family Resource Program enabled a connection to be made. It gave the opportunity for the foster child and adoptive parents to bond.*

11 Human Early Learning Partnership (2008) StrongStart BC Evaluation Report

## SOCIAL INNOVATION RECOMMENDATION:

We are proposing that the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Education partner with the BC Association of Family Resource Programs to effectively link Family Resource Programs to the network of StrongStart Early Learning Centres and other family development services to provide a cost effective continuum of support services for BC families with young children, particularly those with vulnerabilities.

Sustainable funding would enable Family Resource Programs to reach their full potential in delivering the 5 core areas of service, parallel to Alberta's Parent Link model.

### Alberta Parent Link Outcomes

#### Mid-term Outcomes

- *Diverse populations are served.*
- *Increased number of children with special needs are identified and referred to appropriate agencies.*
- *Increased number of Aboriginal children and parents participate in quality early learning activities.*
- *Children meet developmental milestones.*
- *Community partnerships meet identified needs.*

#### Long-Term Outcomes

- *An increase in positive parent child relationships.*
- *A decrease in the number of children and families who need to re-access family enhancement or protection services after accessing Parent Link Center services.*



For more information contact:

**BC Association of Family Resource Programs**

203 – 2590 Granville Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3H1

T: (604) 738-0068 | F: (604) 738-0568

info@frpbc.ca | www.frpbc.ca

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*James J. Heckman, Nobel Laureate Economist, December 2010, Chicago*