

**Pre-Budget Consultations
Brief
Friday, February 27, 2015
Stephenville, NL**

Submitted by:

**Community Action Committee
for Southwestern Newfoundland
Family Resource Program
P. O. Box 421
Stephenville, NL A2N 2Z5
Tel: (709) 643-5399
Fax: (709) 643-5490
E-mail: bsgcacnf@nfld.net**

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Background Information

The Community Action Committee for Southwestern Newfoundland, Inc. is a non-profit organization with 20 years experience providing community-based services and supports for expectant mothers and their infants as well as young children from birth to six years and their families. The Committee is committed to the development and implementation of Family Resource Programs which help to meet the health, social and development needs of children. An array of programs are facilitated through a network of eight school and community-based Family Resource Centres, four Healthy Baby Clubs and outreach programs offered throughout the southwestern region including the Port au Port Peninsula, Stephenville and area, Stephenville Crossing, St. George's, Bay St. George South, Port aux Basques, Codroy Valley and Coastal Communities and Burgeo and Coastal Communities. Programs include the Healthy Baby Club Prenatal Support Program; Infant and Toddler Programs; Drop-in Play; Preschool; Literacy Programs; Healthy Eating and Active Living Initiatives; Child Injury Prevention; and supportive education programs for parents and caregivers. In many of our more rural and remote communities, Family Resource Programs offer the only early childhood development and family support opportunities for infants/children and their families.

Core funding is provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP). The committee also receives annual funding from the Provincial Department of Education Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) and Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

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The overall goal of the Community Action Committee is to assist families in meeting the health, social and developmental needs of young children by providing and advocating for quality services, supports and programs in environments that are supportive, encourage participation and involvement and enhance individual, family, and community capacity. Activities are focused on supporting children and families, reducing inequalities, addressing barriers to participation and enhancing social inclusion.

Healthy Baby Club Model

The importance of early human development experiences on lifelong learning is well-researched and documented. The need to develop and establish seamless early childhood programs is evident, beginning during the prenatal stage. The Healthy Baby Club model provides a wide range of prenatal supports including home visiting, food supplements, cooking and nutrition sessions, prenatal education, breast feeding promotion and support, peer support and postnatal follow-up. The Community Action Committee for Southwestern Newfoundland facilitates four Healthy Baby Club sites in the region (Ship Cove on the Port au Port Peninsula, Stephenville, St. George's, and Port aux Basques).

The need for prenatal support and post-natal follow-up for expectant mothers and their infants especially those who face difficult life circumstances (which may include poverty, lack of family support, teen and/or lone parenting, mental health issues, addictions issues, family violence, etc.) is evident. In addition to prenatal services and supports, there is a great need for community-based support and follow-up with the new mom and her baby during the first year of the infant's life. New HBC moms often lack basic skills, resources, knowledge and understanding of infant and early child development and do not have access to family and community support needed to ensure the healthy development of their infant.

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The Healthy Baby Club provides a supportive pre and post natal intervention with new mothers facing difficult life circumstances. HBC provides much needed community-based services for high risk mothers which includes the provision of food supplements, prenatal education and support, cooking and nutrition sessions, infant care, infant/child safety and injury prevention, and parenting programs and workshops to assist new mothers, their infants and families during the critical prenatal and postnatal period of development. Annually the Healthy Baby Club sites throughout the region provide prenatal services and supports to over 150 expectant mothers and continued postnatal follow up with the new mothers and their infants to ensure the best possible start for mother and baby.

Family Resource Centres

The network of school and community-based Family Resource Centres throughout Southwestern Newfoundland offer an array of services and programs that meet the health and development needs of young children from birth to six years of age and their parents/caregivers. Play is central to a child's healthy development. Centres are set up to encourage play and socialization in an environment that is both supportive and stimulating. Child-parent programs encourage positive interaction, fun learning through play experiences, and child-parent bonding. Parenting support groups, workshops and programs offer parenting skills and coping strategies, help parents understand the ages and stages of child development, and provide positive discipline techniques that help to guide children's behavior. All programs and activities are provided free of charge. Over the past year approximately 500 families participated in programs and activities offered through the Family Resource Program.

Preschool – School-Based Model

High quality, universal, available and affordable early childhood education is economic development with a very high return. Decades of research reveals social and economic benefits that include health, improved quality of life, education, employment, and community engagement throughout the life cycle. Research data shows that developmental vulnerabilities are not exclusive to children from low-income homes but exist across the economic spectrum.

Presently, the Community Education Network in partnership with the Community Action Committee is the licensee for three regulated school-based preschools in the southwestern region (Lourdes, Stephenville Crossing, and Burgeo) providing a preschool experience for approximately 60 three and four year olds. Most children in the region do not have the opportunity to share in the preschool experience. The benefits of preschool early learning experiences are numerous and are well-documented and by Kindergarten the achievement gap is often evident for those children who do not have access to preschool.

School-based preschools present a successful cost effective model through sharing of existing infrastructure and resources. They also promote collaborative partnerships between family, school and community in meeting the developmental needs of young children.

Summary

Early childhood development and family support programs are a social and economic investment with proven high returns. Building on existing foundations such as school-based preschools, providing continued funding for community-based programs and services such as Healthy Baby Clubs and Family Resource Programs, and enhancing existing partnerships between community and government offer immediate opportunities to address the needs of families and children in our province in a meaningful and cost-effective manner. This approach means immediate cost savings in terms of the health and well-being of infants and children and long-term cost savings to services such as health, education, social services, and justice. We cannot afford to reduce direct community-based services for young children and families who are facing difficult life circumstances. Continued commitment to the alleviation of the impact of poverty as well as the reduction of poverty in our province must continue to ensure families are able to meet the basic needs of their infants and children. By working together, government and community can ensure every child has the best possible start is given the every opportunity to reach his or her full potential.