

Connecting and Caring in the Cowichan Valley



Ways to make a difference

2010



www.cowichankids.ca

Background

"The future begins to show up as we gather."

Peter Block

Over the past year our community has been gathering in many ways to talk about the importance of early childhood and how best to support children and families. We looked at research and we also made wishes. In the process, we found that making connections was just as important as identifying some areas for action.

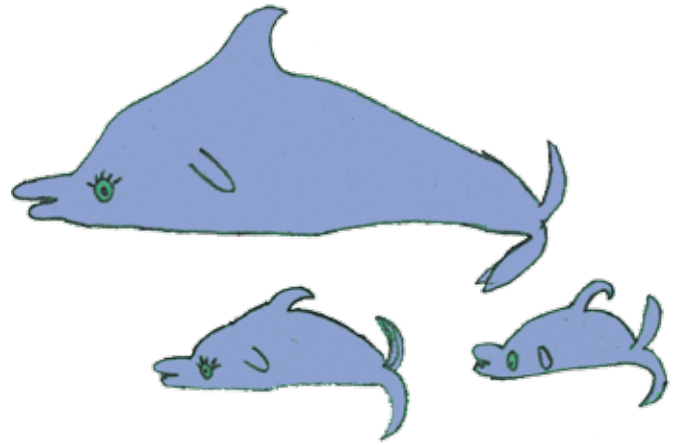
"A community's well-being simply has to do with the quality of relationships among its citizens."

Robert Putnam

We can create the conditions for children to become healthier and happier.

Relationships

- Encourage the development of strong relationships within families and community – they are the key to ensuring that children develop social and emotional competence.
- Create a safe space for all to have a voice and collaborate on joint projects, funding opportunities and planning.
- Use our existing individual and community strengths to create the social fabric that supports us all. We can do this if we keep meeting and talking as a whole community. Anyone can attend meetings and events hosted by Success by 6 and the Cowichan Birth to Six Committee, or the newly formed Community Health Network, to ensure that early childhood development becomes a community priority and that resources are allocated to coordinate efforts.



Awareness

- Create more awareness about the importance of early childhood development and supporting ALL children and families -- especially those most in need. Talk with friends and neighbours, chiefs, mayors, counsellors, CVRD directors, school trustees, directors of boards, MPs and MLAs, about: poverty reduction; high-quality, affordable childcare and early education; affordable, safe housing; employment; transportation for families to access programs and services; and, working together for communities in which everyone lives well.
- Designate decision-makers as local champions for children who will advocate for healthy children and families, balanced lifestyles and diversity.
- Collaborate to coordinate research and develop a communications strategy.

Tools and knowledge

- Value parents, and other primary caregivers, as children's first and best teachers. Support them with meaningful, accessible information and programs to raise healthy, happy children and to grow as parents and individuals.
- Support efforts to reduce poverty and improve children's scores in all domains of development by supporting actions identified in the Human Early Learning Partnership's 15 by 15 Policy Framework www.earlylearning.ubc.ca to build on: maternity and parental leave and existing employment standards; income support policies to mitigate poverty; pregnancy, health and parenting supports; early education and care services; and, the work of local early childhood development community coalitions.

It's important to let families know that they are not alone – that their community does care about them.

*Mary Dolan, Early Childhood Educator,
Advocate for Children and Families*

The Early Years Last a Lifetime

Decades of research in neurobiology, developmental psychology, economics and the social sciences have resulted in a new understanding of the importance of the early years, which starts at conception.

Love Grows Brains - Brains Grow Love

When human beings are born their brains are not fully developed. After a child is born much is still required to help that baby's brain develop in a way that will increase their life chances and potential. So in addition to the things we take as givens, like food and physical safety, the way the brain develops is heavily dependent on the presence of nurturing relationships.

Rob Santos, Healthy Child Manitoba

Why is early childhood development so important to our community?

Given what we know about the importance of early childhood development to lifelong learning, health and behaviour, we must take action to reduce vulnerability levels for today's children.

Human Early Learning Partnership

Our Challenges

Parents crave community, but the community is not meeting what parents see as their needs. Parents need both tangible and intangible support. We need to create and foster a community culture that supports parents and their young children, and that sees parenting as a shared responsibility between parents and their community.

Vital Communities, Vital Support: Survey of Canadian Parents 2007 (www.investinkids.ca)

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a tool that assesses kindergarten-aged children's development. It reflects the quality of their early childhood experiences in the areas of physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills/general knowledge.

The **2009 Cowichan Valley School District 79 EDI results** show that there are differences in the levels of vulnerability of children between neighbourhoods. But overall, 23.6 % of children assessed in 2009 were vulnerable on one or more of the EDI scales. Social competency and emotional maturity were the areas with highest vulnerabilities. To view all of the EDI maps visit earlylearning.ubc.ca.

Children under two should have zero TV and computer time for healthy development. Yet 90% of kids begin watching TV before age two.

Children's health issues are significantly higher in the Cowichan Valley than in other BC Communities. Respiratory illness with hospitalization is 53% higher; children in care 57% higher; child abuse cases 3 times higher; Infant mortality 61 % higher; Cowichan District Hospital had 21% more low-birth-weight babies and 52% more stillbirths. *Vancouver Island Health Authority*

Putting children first

Everything should be invested in the child - the tree, the land, the food. Get out of the way. The child comes first. All our efforts should be for the children. *Florence James, Penelakut Tribes - Vancouver Island University Elder-in-Residence*

What is possible when we all come together?

There are no **limits** to the kind of community can we create together: babies, children, youth, parents, adults and Elders, when we **form and maintain relationships with respect, trust and understanding.**

Some suggestions from Cowichan Valley people for weaving our social fabric:

- **Start** a new project or join a group.
- Make your business or neighbourhood more **family friendly**.
- Help someone who's having a rough day.
- **Love** unconditionally.
- Cherish childhood and parenthood.
- **Include** someone who is left out.
- Volunteer at one of the places listed in the Cowichan Valley **Family Resource Guide** online at www.cowichankids.ca.
- Do one thing **different**: put yourself "out there" and make connections.
- Set an example - become a mentor.
- Make a space or place **safe**.
- **Share** your gifts - show someone how to cook, kick a soccer ball or **appreciate** nature.
- Balance your life. Encourage employers to include community participation in work plans and job descriptions.
- Hold a **neighbourhood** barbecue or dance.
- Engage in lifelong **learning**.
- **Reflect** on the people and places that inspired **your own childhood** and bring it into the community.
- Make a **wish**. Then make it come true.
- Keep talking. **Keep listening**. Keep moving.



If you come here to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us begin.

Lily Walker, Australian Aboriginal women's leader

Celebration

It is important to acknowledge that, while we have challenges, there are people in our community who just go ahead and make a difference and have been doing so for many years in all the work and volunteering they do.

Since our last early years action plan in 2006:



- A *Cowichan Kids* Magazine and Website, Program Guide, Family Resource Guide and early years messaging were developed to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development and how our community supports children and families.
- Aboriginal Success by 6 was funded and quickly began to bring new programs and services to local First Nation communities.
- A Regional Childcare Task Force and the Literacy Now Cowichan initiative were created.
- Many meetings, forums and gatherings were held to help people identify needs and build relationships.
- A Community Resource Bus brings fun activities right to where families live around the Cowichan Valley.
- Strong Start programs were established in several elementary schools and many agencies continue to provide other quality parent/child and parent education & support programs and early learning and childcare services.
- A new pool (with free childcare) and a water park were built in Duncan.



*In this life there is nothing great that you can do.
But you can do small things with great love.
Mother Theresa*

Visit www.cowichankids.ca to access resources and find out about events and initiatives; learn more about early childhood development; share your wisdom and experience; get involved in community across jurisdictions and geography; help develop a constituency that promotes decision making based on community well-being.

For further information on how to get involved, contact Cindy Lise at cindylsuccessby6@shaw.ca or Ada Mawson at ada.mawson@csets.com.

Success By 6
Helping all children succeed for life.



U E Y
cowichan
Understanding the Early Years