

Success in Early Childhood: *How Do We Get There?*



Today's children will determine what society will be like in the future. They will shape the world! Our children are precious and full of potential. Yet they are also vulnerable, and deserve to grow up in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment. Children who are well cared for in their earliest years are far more likely to be successful in school, more productive at work, have greater financial success and be healthier throughout their lives. Children with a good start in life are less likely to fall behind in school, get into trouble with the law, depend on social services, live in poverty, be homeless or have issues with addictions.

Early childhood is the time in a child's life from the prenatal period to when they begin formal schooling. This includes the infant, toddler and preschool years.

Early childhood development refers to the skills, abilities and milestones that children reach – or are expected to reach – by certain ages in their first years of life. These milestones include walking, talking, learning, sharing and caring about others.

Why the Early Years are So Important

- James Heckman, an economist and Nobel Prize winner has calculated that spending \$1 on early childhood programs pays the same dividends as spending \$3 on school-age programs and \$8 on education for young adults. How can that be? The answer has to do with the importance of early childhood development and its life-long impact.

Research on brain development tells us that:

- The child's capacity to learn, create, love, trust and develop a strong sense of self are determined early in life.
- The brain grows most rapidly between birth and age three.

- Brain development continues throughout life, but the brain is most open to change during the early years.
- The brain responds and adapts to the child's relationships and environment.
- Brain connections in early life are made that control different physical, behavioural and cognitive (thinking) functions, including hearing, vision, language, learning, problem solving and memory.
- Once brain connections are formed, they are more difficult to change.
- What happens in early childhood helps prevent heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and social issues of crime, alcoholism, illegal drug use and abuse in adults.
- The rate of teen pregnancy, delinquency and social services involvement is decreased.
- Learning problems that keep children from reaching their full potential are reduced so the child can achieve his or her goals and dreams.
- It is more effective and less costly to create the right early childhood development conditions than to address problems later in life.

Working Together

Early childhood development is important to all of us. The Northwest Territories *Framework for Action: Early Childhood Development* is currently being renewed. The Departments of Health and Social Services (HSS) and Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) want to hear your views on how the healthy development of children can be supported in the NWT. Your input matters.

Please provide your thoughts and ideas by clicking on and completing the appropriate confidential online survey(s). We need to hear from you **by January 10, 2013**.

Survey for **Parents and Community Members**

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NWTparents_community_at_large

Survey for **Early Childhood Development Professionals**

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NWT_ECD_providers

Survey for **Northern Leaders**

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NWTcommunity_leaders

Next Steps

The GNWT will use this and other information to create a renewed early childhood development framework that is responsive to the needs of our children. We want your input so we can take action. Thank you for your support. We look forward to hearing from you!