



Understanding the Early Years in Southeast Saskatchewan

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the UEY initiative?

The Understanding the Early Years (UEY) national initiative, funded and managed by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, was created in response to the growing evidence of the importance of the early years. It is a research and community development project designed to enable members of communities to work together to address the needs of young children in their midst.

How broad is the scope of the UEY project?

At the national level, the UEY Initiative provides a snapshot of children in Canada as a whole, and their progression over time. Since 1999, 49 UEY initiatives have been conducted across Canada, enabling us to learn about children's developmental outcomes and school readiness specifically by local neighbourhoods, communities, and regions.

Why study the early years?

There is increasing evidence that shows the importance of investing in the early years of children's development. Research over the past 20 years has shown that the early experiences in children's lives can have lifelong impact. The evidence also suggests that the neighbourhoods and communities in which children live influence their development, by affecting adults' abilities to provide positive environments for children to grow and learn.

Who is involved in the PCPF Community?

Today, the following agencies and organizations make up the Prairie Children...Prairie Futures UEY subcommittee of the Southeast Saskatchewan Regional Intersectoral Committee: Holy Family RCSSD No.140, South East Cornerstone School Division (School Division referred to as SD hereafter), Good Spirit SD, Christ the Teacher SD, Prairie Valley SD; Horizon SD (for George Gordon Education Centre and Punnichy Elementary School); Yorkton Tribal Council, File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, Touchwood Agency Tribal Council, and 23 First Nations communities; St. Augustine RCSSD No.220; Sun Country, Sunrise and Regina Qu'Appelle Health Regions; Ministry of Social Services; the Regional Intersectoral Committee Community Coordinator; Early Learning and Child Care representatives and Regional Early Learning and Child Care Consultants with the Ministry of Education; Regina, Parkland, Southeast, and Weyburn and Area Early Childhood Intervention Programs; *KidsFirst* Yorkton and *KidsFirst* Regional Community Developers; Parkland and South East Regional Libraries, and a number of community-based organizations.

How are the partners involved?

The partners are part of a coalition which is a subcommittee of the Southeast Regional Intersectoral Committee, and have adopted the name Prairie Children...Prairie Futures Understanding the Early Years for this UEY project in Southeast Saskatchewan. This committee gives guidance and direction to the work of the Community Coordinator and Research Team. School Divisions are actively involved in data collection, and others have contributed greatly to the development of the Inventory of Community Programs and Services. Coalition members also assist with dissemination of information including presenting of workshops, distributing information such as posters and fact sheets, and assisting with the development of a variety of communication materials to build knowledge regarding the early years. The partners are also diligent in working on a sustainability plan to ensure the work of the UEY continues long after this initiative is completed.

How were the study areas decided?

In order to provide some continuum with past data collection, it was decided by the Coalition to use the previously-defined boundaries as a starting point for the UEY study areas. It was critical to divide our study areas in ways that would be meaningful for future work by respecting school division boundaries. It was necessary to combine several existing “neighbourhoods” into the UEY study areas and make appropriate boundary changes in keeping with Census Dissemination Areas. Expert guidance on developing study areas was also provided by Nazeem Muhajarine of the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit, our research partner.

Each of the four largest communities became a study area: Yorkton, Melville, Weyburn and Estevan. The Coalition was also sensitive and respectful of the need to define study areas for First Nations communities in a manner supportive of the political authority of the First Nations tribal jurisdictions when considering First Nations schools. In the end, 27 study areas were established throughout the region of the Prairie Children...Prairie Futures, Southeast Saskatchewan.

How was the community inventory compiled?

In 2008, Prairie Children . . . Prairie Futures UEY created an Inventory of Community Programs and Services for children ages six and under, collecting information on educational programs, child-care services, pre-Kindergartens, preschools, sports and recreation, entertainment and culture, health and wellness, and faith-based programs. Information on other facilities important to young children, such as schools, leisure centres, libraries, health practitioners and health facilities was also collected. A list of all potential programs was compiled using local directories, the Internet, and word of mouth. These programs were then surveyed, to learn more about their programming. Every effort was made to ensure that no program was missed; however, it is quite possible that some programs of interest were overlooked and therefore are not included in the inventory, which is accurate as of October, 2008. This information was also compiled into an Early Years and Family Services Guide. This Guide is available online at www.prairiechildrenewey.com, or on CD by request.

How was the resource access and availability score developed?

Using the information from the Inventory, each program was given a Resource access and availability score. The following factors helped to determine how accessible a program is: whether or not there is a waiting list; hours of operation; availability of transportation to and from the site; accessibility to people with disabilities; and program cost. Scores were then calculated for each study area, to help describe the abundance or lack of programming available and accessible for children and families in that area.

How was the social risk index developed? Why is this important?

To examine the challenges facing each study area, the research team developed a social-risk index that takes into account six factors that have been shown to hinder children’s health and development. These were the education level of adults in the study area, employment level of adults, income level of families, residential stability (as measured by the number of people who had moved in the past year), numbers of single-parent families and reliance on government transfers. Data for these factors was drawn from the 2001 census. Study areas were then given a score between one and six on the Social Risk Index, with one being the lowest risk, and six being the highest risk. The Social Risk Index helps highlight study areas that face significant socio-economic challenges, and may require extra supports in the form of programs and services.

What is next in the Project?

Prairie Children . . . Prairie Futures UEY has successfully completed the first major phase of the project. In 2009, Kindergarten teachers will be evaluating each of their students in five areas using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a checklist that measures children’s “readiness-to-learn” in five domains: physical health and well-being; social skills; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge. A smaller group of children will participate in the Parent Interviews and Direct Assessments of Children Survey (PIDACS), which gathers data through interviews and observation of the children as they complete three activities testing their development.

Once all the data are received, in 2010 we will develop a second Mapping Report that shows how children’s outcomes compare to access to programs and services, and the social and economic aspects of the study areas in which they live. These findings will be shared with the community and will provide the foundation for a community action plan to monitor Southeast Saskatchewan’s progress over time.