



## **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) Program**

### **Evaluation 2008: Highlights Report**

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For: Early Years Team  
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The Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) Program: Evaluation 2008 was conducted by Agency Research Consultants and has been funded by the Province of British Columbia under the guidance of the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development Early Years Team. This report presents a summary of the findings of this project.

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## **Introduction**

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In May of 2008, Agency Research Consultants was contracted by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to conduct an evaluation of the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program. The CCRR program, operated through a number of non-profit organizations and funded by MCFD, is part of an overall strategy to improve the quality, capacity and inclusiveness of child care in British Columbia (BC) communities. There are 40 individual sites located in five regions across the province. Key client groups of the CCRRs include child care providers and families. CCRRs provide information, resources, and support to enhance awareness of and access to quality child care.

The program has been through several changes in recent years, including the addition of Regional Coordinators and changes in funding levels. In recognition of the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the program, this project was initiated to ensure that CCRR objectives are consistent with the current needs of BC communities and to better inform future decision making.

The following document provides highlights of this program evaluation.

### **Purpose of this Evaluation**

The purpose of the CCRR Program Evaluation was to:

- Determine the efficiency and effectiveness of current services;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of current services;
- Determine if the program's budget and expected outcomes are aligned; and
- Identify opportunities for change and/or improvements to service delivery.

To accomplish these objectives, a number of different people were consulted in order to provide a broad range of perspectives, including key client groups, staff, and community stakeholders. The information collected through this evaluation will help MCFD ensure that the CCRR program is achieving its objectives and delivering an effective service that meets the needs of children, families, child care providers, and communities.

## **Evaluation Methodology**

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This evaluation included telephone and in-person interviews, focus groups, email questionnaires, and an online survey in addition to an analysis of statistical information.

### **On-Site Data Collection**

Site visits were scheduled with one CCRR in each of the five regions across BC, with the exception of the Interior where two sites were selected due to the large number of CCRRs in this area. An equal number of rural and urban settings were randomly selected to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The six sites selected for on-site research were: Surrey (Fraser Region); Kamloops (Interior Region); Trail (Interior Region); Sechelt (Vancouver Coastal Region); Smithers (Northern Region); and Nanaimo (Vancouver Island Region). At each site visited, one-on-one

interviews were held with program staff and separate focus groups were conducted with parents and child care providers.

### **Telephone Interviews**

Telephone interviews were conducted with staff representatives of all CCRR locations that were not visited on-site. The same interview questions and interviewing technique prepared for the on-site interviews were used for the interviews conducted by phone.

### **Email Questionnaire for Regional Coordinators**

In order to gather the unique insights into the CCRR program held by Regional Coordinators (RCs), a questionnaire was distributed to each of the five RCs via email. All five completed and returned these forms.

### **Online Survey**

An online survey was used to collect information from a broad range of individuals associated with the CCRR programs. The online survey was hosted on Agency Research Consultants' web site and could be accessed from June 11, 2008 to July 11, 2008. Information about the survey was distributed through local CCRR email lists, via links on local web sites, through newsletters, and through posters displayed at the locations.

### **Analysis**

A system for coding comments into themes was developed for the interview transcripts, focus group data and open-ended comments from the online survey. The purpose of this analysis was to identify common ideas in responses. Statistical data analysis was conducted using the quarterly statistics submitted by each CCRR to MCFD. These data reflect program and service usage and cover the fiscal years from 2005-06 through to 2007-08. These statistics were used to analyze current year figures, year over year change, and differences between regions.

## **Summary of Results**

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The evaluation of the CCRR program emphasized four areas: service utilization, quality of services, client and staff satisfaction, and the outcomes of the program, including its ability to meet its stated objectives. This section describes the evaluation participants and then addresses each of the four areas of emphasis in turn.

### **Evaluation Participants**

Participants in this evaluation were members of several key groups involved with the CCRR, including child care providers, parents, representatives of community and government organizations, and CCRR staff. The numbers of participants in each group varied according to the method of participation. The online survey attracted the highest level of participation and was completed by 1,306 participants from each of the four key groups. Focus groups were comprised of both child care providers and parents, while CCRR staff were invited to participate via in-person and telephone interviews. Table 1 provides a summary of the number and type of participants who responded for each of the different methods.

**Table 1: Summary of all evaluation participants**

Method	Participant Group	Number of Participants
Focus groups	Child care providers	41
Focus groups	Parents/guardians	21
In-person interviews	Staff	18
Telephone interviews	Staff	37
Email questionnaire	Regional Coordinators	5
Online Survey	All	1,306
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,428<sup>1</sup></b>

Nearly half (48 per cent) of participants in the online survey were child care providers (See Table 2). Among this group, participants were most likely to be women working full-time in the child care field at licensed establishments. These participants most often had a college or technical diploma, which was likely tied to training they received to provide child care. The length of time they have been involved in providing child care spanned a wide range, as did the length of time they have been involved with the CCRR. Child care providers also formed 66 per cent of the participants in focus groups. Background information collected from focus group participants showed a similar demographic profile to the online survey.

**Table 2: Participation in the online survey by participant group**

Participant Group	Number of Participants	%
Child care provider	622	48%
Community partner	274	21%
Parent or guardian	225	17%
CCRR program staff	140	11%
Educator/ development professional	27	2%
CCRR Regional Coordinator	5	<1%
Other	13	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,306</b>	<b>100%</b>

Staff of local community and government organizations represented the second largest group (21 per cent) of online survey participants. They were also most likely to be women who were working full-time and who held a university degree.

Parents represented 17 per cent of the online survey sample. Parents reported having shorter involvement with the CCRR than did child care providers, which may in part account for their smaller rate of response. Among parents who participated in the online survey, most tended to be educated women with support from a partner at home and a higher reported household income compared to other survey groups. Background information collected from parents participating in focus groups also showed a similar demographic profile to the online survey. It should be cautioned, however, that this evaluation was more likely to gather participation from those included on CCRR

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<sup>1</sup> Because there were no measures in place to prevent focus group or interview participants in also responding to the online survey, some of the respondents may have responded to both methods.

contact lists. Parents whose only contact with the CCRRs was to receive a referral to a child care provider (a group that could be significant in number) may be less likely to be included on these lists and, hence, less likely to receive an invitation to participate in the evaluation. The overall profile of parents who have ever used CCRR programs and services could differ from those who participated in this evaluation, but it is not possible to determine precisely how they could be different.

A total of 55 CCRR staff were interviewed in person and via the telephone and 140 participated in the online survey. CCRR staff made up 11 per cent of the participants in the online survey. Combined with the interview responses, CCRR staff represent 14 per cent of the total participants in this evaluation.

### **Service Utilization**

Each CCRR is contracted through MCFD to provide a number of different services. The delivery of these services varies at each location based on funding and the unique needs of each community. For the purposes of this evaluation, the programs and services offered through the CCRR were categorized into the following ten service areas<sup>2</sup>:

- Recruitment of License Not Required (LNR) child care providers, including recruiting LNRs to the registry list and maintaining a count of those who seek licensing;
- Referrals to parents in search of child care, including maintaining lists of providers and available child care spaces;
- Support visits to child care providers that allow the CCRRs to assist and develop relationships with clients;
- Training opportunities including workshops and courses offered to child care providers, parents, and others in the community;
- Outreach services including networking opportunities and drop in sessions for child care providers and parents;
- Materials and equipment for lending including resource centres and toy and equipment lending libraries;
- Staff consultations and support offered via email, phone, and in person;
- Providing memberships for Licensed Family Child Care (LFCC) and Licensed Group Child Care (LGCC) providers (including new and renewing members);
- Assistance with parent applications for subsidy assistance; and
- Provision of publicly accessible computer, fax, and phone services.

Four times a year, staff at each CCRR collect statistics on the use of services for each of these categories and submit the results to MCFD. The figures provided for the past two fiscal years were analyzed in an effort to determine year over year change in usage of CCRR programs and services across the province.

A few CCRR services showed increases in usage for 2007/08 compared to 2006/07, including consultations with clients, assistance with subsidy applications, and the licensing of child care

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<sup>2</sup> While the CCRR Programs do provide a number of services that are not captured in this list, such as work to retain LNR and RLNR child care providers, only those services for which statistical information is available were categorized in this list.

providers. However, the majority of services have seen a decline in use compared to the previous year, as shown in Table 3, below. Declines were seen in:

- The number of LNRs listed on registries;
- Referral requests from parents;
- Support visits conducted (especially among those provided to licensed programs);
- Training opportunities offered;
- Networking, drop-in and outreach services provided;
- Materials and equipment distributed; and
- Parents accessing computers and other technology.

**Table 3: Year to year change in utilization by service**

Service	2006/07	2007/08	Change (%)
LNRs listed on registry	800	732	-8.5%
LNRs licensed during year	85	107	25.9%
Referral requests	37,299	32,232	-13.6%
Support visits - LNRs	3,035	2,166	-28.6%
Support visits - Licensed	2,235	977	-56.3%
Workshops	956	750	-21.5%
Courses	309	245	-20.7%
Networking – established	338	302	-10.7%
Networking – provided	1,213	995	-18%
Drop ins – established	291	273	-6.2%
Drop-ins – provided	3,597	2,534	-29.6%
Communities with drop ins	380	279	-26.6%
Resource materials lent	110,303	96,147	-12.8%
Consultations	249,120	258,219	3.7%
Memberships	3,118	3,135	0.6%
Subsidy applications	15,218	15,318	0.7%
Public use of computers	946	496	-47.6%

In order to continue to deliver services that match the needs of their communities, CCRRs have begun to pair services together and offer creative solutions. Offering networking opportunities alongside training, providing outreach services over the phone, and creating relationships with local educational institutions are some of the approaches described in this evaluation.

## Quality of Services and Programs Delivered Through the CCRR

### Advertising and Promotions

In addition to MCFD promotional efforts, staff were asked about the types of advertising they have used to promote the services of their CCRR. The results, as described in Table 5, below, indicate that most of the advertising that takes place through individual CCRRs is done via newsletters published on a regular basis, advertising in local media and/or presentations to other organizations or to the general public.

**Table 5: Top 5 methods of program promotion from staff, online survey**

Method of Promotion	Frequency	%*
Paper newsletters	110	96%
Presentations at community events/facilities	109	96%
Advertising - Print media	89	78%
Online newsletters	85	75%
Trade shows and exhibits	80	70%

\*Participants could select multiple responses.

In addition, CCRR staff indicated that they often attend early childhood education meetings and network informally with other non-profit agencies at community events. This networking and information sharing is an important way for organizations to communicate with one another about the programs and services they offer, and the results of this evaluation indicate that this type of information sharing between organizations leads to client referrals to CCRR programs.

Indeed, 16 per cent of respondents to the online survey indicated that they learned about the CCRR from a referral, while a total of 41 per cent indicated that they learned about the CCRR from someone else who had used or knew about their services. Interestingly, very few (5 per cent) respondents indicated that they found out about the CCRR through the Internet. These results suggest that relationships and personal experience are currently the primary method through which CCRR programs and services are being promoted across the province. Word of mouth is a particularly effective way of communicating because sharing personal experiences permits positive and encouraging messages about the CCRR and its services to be spread. Table 6, below, outlines the different means by which parents and child care providers who responded to the online survey reported hearing about the CCRR.

**Table 6: Top 5 sources of information for parents and child care providers, online survey**

Source of Information – Survey Results	Frequency	%
Word of mouth / heard from friends or relatives	279	41%
Referred by a government or non-government agency	110	16%
CCRR Newsletter	73	11%
Brochure or other printed material	46	7%
Found website through online search	35	5%

### Staff Experience and Expertise

Because it is the staff of the individual CCRRs who provide a face to the programs and deliver the services, their experience and expertise are an important indicator of the program's success and the information they shared in interviews was an important component of this evaluation. Some of the different elements considered as part of this evaluation included staff members' backgrounds, their length of involvement in the CCRR, and their particular skills and abilities.

All staff participants reported being involved in child care in one form or another prior to working at the CCRR. Most frequently, CCRR staff reported working as child care providers themselves - as LNR providers, in licensed child care facilities/centres, preschools, or in specialized settings (e.g. with special needs children, in child protection, and in recreational groups). Parents and child care providers expressed that the experience staff bring to their positions is greatly appreciated and has a significant and positive impact on the overall quality of the program.

The results of the evaluation also showed that most staff have been involved with the CCRR program for several years. In fact, roughly a third of staff participants in the online survey and phone interviews indicated that they have worked for the CCRR for ten or more years. The longevity of staff also suggests that individuals who work for the CCRR are committed to the program and invested in the quality of services provided.

CCRR staff participants reported that funding changes have required them to decrease the total number of staffing hours available. This has impacted the delivery of CCRR services and the ability of programs to recruit and retain quality staff. Parents and child care providers who participated in this evaluation noted instances where CCRRs have been unable to retain staff who have built strong relationships within the community and upon whom they have come to depend for support and information. This has also been perceived by these client groups as challenges in the ability of CCRR staff to meet demand for particular services.

Staff reported that shortages have created challenges in terms of day-to-day operations. Sick leave, holidays, and professional development coverage proved to be difficult with staffing limitations and additional pressures have been placed on staff remaining in the office. Both parents and child care providers commented on the effects of staffing issues with some indicating that services were unavailable due to the lack of staffing, while others expressed sympathy for staff that appeared to be stretched too thin. Comments from parents and child care providers demonstrated that clients who have witnessed the effects of staffing shortages may not only feel that they have access to fewer services, but also the perception that staff are under stress may result in a further decrease in service usage because they do not wish to add to the workload.

### Regional Coordinators (RCs)

In 2004, the CCRR program was expanded to include five RCs to support the CCRR services in each of the regions. Their roles involve not only supporting and promoting the programs in their region, but acting as a liaison to facilitate communication between MCFD and the individual sites and between each of the regions. Consultations with the RCs were included in this evaluation to obtain their unique perspectives.

The RCs expressed that their role allowed for increased efficiency in running the program as MCFD no longer needs to communicate independently with all 40 sites. At the same time, this improves the

flow of information from each site to MCFD by providing a comfortable means of communicating with an individual who has a greater awareness and understanding of the challenges they face.

According to the RCs, the relationships they have with the individual programs and with MCFD are positive. RCs expressed that they feel supported and believe that they receive a high degree of respect in their roles.

#### Consistency and Accessibility across Regions

An important aspect of quality for a program that spans several locations is whether individual sites have a common understanding of program goals, objectives, and intended outcomes. In addition, it is important to assess whether or not the individual programs are accessible and available to the client population they are intended to serve.

The results of this evaluation showed that CCRR staff across regions agree on which activities are essential to promoting child care options. They share a strong commitment to advocating for quality child care in their communities and a desire to improve the lives of children and families. In other words, staff are interpreting their role in the community in similar ways. They are also interpreting the tasks required of them in a similar manner.

However, regional differences do exist, and these have an impact on clients' overall experience of the CCRRs. This evaluation drew out several differences between CCRRs in different regions, though most of these variations can be linked to factors external to the programs themselves, such as demographics and geography.

One example is that some regions have very few LNR child care providers, while others have so many that they have had to limit the number they can support at any given time. While the CCRR may be able to influence the number of care providers available in a community to some degree through recruitment, licensing, and registration work, they are limited by factors such as the number of potential care providers that are available and the desire of people within the community to enter this field of work.

Differences were also noted in clients' interest in and use of particular services. In some areas, parents and child care providers were more interested in and dependent on services like drop-ins, networking or outreach programs, while in other areas, there was less perceived interest and need. An urban/rural difference is often significant – in larger communities, several other agencies may exist where parents and care providers can access resources and training, reducing the need for the CCRR to provide a wider range of services. In smaller areas, however, the CCRR may be the community's only resource for child care services.

Regardless of whether it is in an urban or rural setting, CCRR locations present barriers to some clients. Staff, child care providers and parents who took part in the evaluation commented on transportation issues, both in terms of clients coming in to access services and in terms of staff being able to go out to satellite or outreach communities to provide support. Although it would be impossible to find locations that would adequately suit every potential client's needs, it is important to recognize that the current locations of the CCRRs do create barriers to access for some people.

CCRR sites are contracted to provide hours of operation that ensure the program is available to as many clients as possible. When asked about hours, the majority of clients and staff indicated that the current hours met their needs; however, a strong minority (22 per cent of child care providers and 16 per cent of parents) noted that more evening and weekend hours were needed to meet their needs.

Evaluation participants also identified a number of barriers to accessibility such as language and cultural differences. These issues are important to address because they identify specific groups that may be harder to reach and whose needs may be going unmet in certain communities. These populations include:

- English as a Second Language (ESL) clients
- Clients who belong to minority ethnic groups, including Aboriginal clients
- Low income parents
- Gay and lesbian families

The perception of the need for diversity and services geared toward reaching diverse client groups was varied. While many CCRRs expressed a need for and an interest in services that are responsive to the Aboriginal and other minority communities that they serve, others believed that there was not a need for these services in their communities and the resources they had developed were underutilized.

Among those for whom multicultural issues were a priority, there was a feeling that awareness and addressing accessibility was something that had to be considered on a continual basis in all efforts and services. CCRR staff address multicultural issues in a wide variety of ways. These include promoting multicultural activities and events such as workshops and sessions; having multicultural and multilingual resources including theme boxes and toys available in the lending libraries; and fostering stronger relationships with other service agencies in the community to which they can provide referrals where necessary.

### **Satisfaction**

Satisfaction levels are essential to an evaluation because they not only highlight the specific aspects of the program that clients enjoy the most – thereby identifying strengths that are easy to build on – but also identify areas of dissatisfaction that may be addressed in order to improve the program.

In this evaluation, child care providers, parents/guardians, and staff were asked about their overall satisfaction with the CCRR program, as well as their satisfaction with specific activities associated with the program. The information below is presented for each of these three key groups involved with the CCRR program.

#### Child Care Providers

In general, child care providers were quite satisfied with the services they had received; referrals to other organizations received the fewest ratings of ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ and even for this item 83 per cent of child care providers surveyed expressed satisfaction (Table 7).

**Table 7: Child care provider-reported levels of satisfaction with CCRR programs and services, rating of 4 or 5 (satisfied or very satisfied), online survey**

Program or Service	Frequency	%*
Workshops and courses	399	87%
Drop-in sessions	146	86%
Resource library	309	88%
Computers and access to other technology	102	85%
Referrals to other organizations	200	83%
Consultations with staff	339	90%
Supportive visits	189	90%
Networking opportunities	266	85%
Outreach programs	95	86%
Other	62	87%

\* Percentages are based on valid responses only. Those who did not respond have been removed from the calculation.

Consultations with staff and support visits were rated highest overall among the programs offered to child care providers. In interviews, child care providers emphasized the value of having the CCRR staff as a resource to turn to. In particular, child care providers identified support in getting started in their profession as something the CCRRs did especially well.

LNRs that had become registered were generally satisfied with the support they had received during the registration process. They were somewhat less satisfied with the registration process itself, though reported levels of satisfaction or high satisfaction were above 80 per cent for both ease of the process and the time required to carry it out.

When asked specifically about dissatisfaction with services, child care providers cited training as the biggest issue. Comments from participants indicated that most training opportunities are geared towards newer workers and are not appropriate for people who have been in the industry for some time. In addition, participants mentioned that there should be more training on specific topics, such as how to handle challenging behaviours and the administration of child care centres. One of the main issues regarding training highlighted by child care providers throughout the evaluation process was that CCRRs are not able to keep up with increased demand especially given recent changes to both child care licensing regulations and ECE Registry requirements.

Although training was the main focus of comments regarding dissatisfaction for child care providers, when asked about improvements to services, other activities were also discussed. Some participants indicated dissatisfaction with the toy lending and library services, mostly with regard to the administration of the service. A small number of participants also noted that library materials were somewhat outdated.

#### Parents/Guardians

Parents tended to be less likely than child care providers to say they were satisfied or very satisfied with the services they had received from the CCRRs, although overall levels of satisfaction remained high (Table 8).

**Table 8: Parent-reported levels of satisfaction with CCRR programs and services, rating of 4 or 5 (satisfied or very satisfied), online survey**

Program or Service	Frequency	%*
Referral list	96	79%
Workshops and courses	53	84%
Drop-in sessions	69	85%
Resource library	69	90%
Computers and access to other technology	27	79%
Assistance with grants and subsidies	58	85%
Referrals to other organizations	60	87%
Consultations with staff	91	88%

\* Percentages are based on valid responses only. Those who did not respond have been removed from the calculation.

The highest satisfaction rating was for the resource library, which parents said they appreciated from a practical and philosophical perspective. Parents also expressed relatively high levels of satisfaction with workshops, drop-in sessions and subsidy assistance. Playgroups in particular were seen as a valuable service, where provided.

Fewer parents were satisfied with the referral process, which is particularly noteworthy since this is seen as a core service provided by the CCRR. Indeed, some parents said that the referral service was the only one they accessed or planned to access from the CCRR, making it a vital part of the program's offerings. However, when asked to explain why they were dissatisfied with the referral service, the majority of parents who provided comments explained that it was because of a lack of child care spaces, not because of the service itself.

Similarly, when asked why they indicated they were dissatisfied with CCRR services, survey respondents most frequently mentioned a lack of child care spaces or an inability to find a space using the referral list they were given (Table 9).

**Table 9: Parent-reported reason for dissatisfaction with services, online survey**

Comments from parents (n=24)	%
Insufficient daycares/providers	42%
Insufficient information provided on referral list	21%
Too few resources	12%
No referral information provided electronically	8%
Daycare too expensive/ did not qualify for subsidy	8%
Difficult to access computers	4%
No support for grandparents	4%
Staff dominate drop-in discussions	4%
Other	12%

However, an additional 29 per cent of comments regarding the referral lists were not related to the availability of child care spaces. Parents commented on the lack of information on the types of child

care available on the referral list and some were dissatisfied with the fact that the referral list was not available electronically.

CCRR Staff

CCRR Staff were asked to consider a number of aspects of their work, including support from MCFD and RCs, professional development and advancement opportunities, personal freedom, work environment, ability to manage workload, funding, and how meaningful they found their work.

The majority of items on the survey received very high ratings from staff, indicating a high level of satisfaction. The highest overall rating was received on the item, “Overall, relations with other staff at my location are good.” This item received a high satisfaction rating from 95 per cent of all staff who completed the online survey (See Table 10). Similarly, 92 per cent of staff gave a high rating to, “My working environment is positive and supportive”, and 90 per cent responded positively to, “Overall, relations with management at my location are good.”

Staff were least likely to agree that their program received adequate funding – only 11 per cent of staff agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Training was another area that was lacking for staff with 60 per cent indicating that they were either satisfied or highly satisfied with opportunities for professional development and training. In the interviews, staff noted that part of the problem stems from the fact that in order to attend professional development courses in smaller CCRRs, the office may have to close because there is no coverage for leaves of absence. Beyond that, however, staff also noted that they were expected to perform duties for which they had not been adequately prepared.

**Table 10: Staff reported agreement with statements about their work environment, rating of 4 or 5 (satisfied or very satisfied), online survey**

Aspect of Work Environment	Frequency	%
I receive adequate support from the CCRR Regional Coordinator.	91	88%
The CCRR Regional Coordinator has responded to my requests in a timely manner.	88	89%
I feel that I am given the freedom and flexibility to pursue new ideas and explore new avenues to promote and support child care services in my community.	90	86%
Overall, relations with management at my location are good.	95	90%
Overall, relations with other staff at my location are good.	99	95%
I feel that I am given adequate opportunities for advancement and promotion.	67	68%
I feel that I am given adequate opportunities for professional development and training.	64	60%
Overall, I feel well equipped to handle my daily workload.	78	75%
My working environment is positive and supportive.	98	92%
My program receives adequate funding and resources that allow me to do my job effectively.	12	11%
I feel that I am making a difference to the availability and quality of child care in the communities that I serve.	92	89%

Thus, while staff seem engaged and passionate about their work, working conditions that require them to offer complex and diverse services with little staff support or opportunities for training and advancement have created the potential for burn out. It is not surprising, therefore, that staff have encountered difficulties with recruitment and retention, as reported earlier.

In addition to the day-to-day nature of their work environment, staff were asked about their relationship to MCFD and particularly to the RCs, whose effect on the program has not previously been evaluated. In general, CCRR staff said they enjoyed their working relationships with RCs and identified a number of benefits to having the position. A small number of staff interviewed felt that the coordinators did not have enough experience to understand their particular needs and said that they bypassed their RC with important questions. The majority, however, were grateful for the position and only wished that they would visit the individual sites more often.

Similarly, most staff expressed that they had a good working relationship with particular MCFD workers. There were areas, however, in which communication was seen as lacking. One important area was with regard to changes to the CCRR programs, including its funding. CCRR staff felt strongly that they should be more involved and more informed of upcoming changes that would affect either the services they provide or their clients.

CCRR staff also expressed that communication could be improved in terms of issues related to Licensing and Early Childhood Development. Staff expressed that they felt left out of the loop in terms of how the CCRR programs fit into such changes. That meant that they were then faced with having to answer questions from parents and child care providers regarding the impact of these changes, despite the fact that licensing requirements are not part of their purview.

That being said, however, it was clear that despite challenges with workload and the feeling of uncertainty that was associated with short-term contracts, CCRR staff felt they were doing important work for their communities and that they were being successful in their efforts to improve access to and knowledge of quality child care services.

## **Outcomes of the CCRR Program**

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### **Immediate Objectives of the Program**

MCFD has identified six immediate objectives that will move the CCRR Program towards its long term goals. They are:

- Increased number of child care providers who are regulated;
- Increased support for informal child care providers' services;
- Increased opportunities for peer support and networking;
- Increased community knowledge of the benefits and characteristics of quality child care;
- Greater potential for CCRR agencies to meet local services needs; and
- Greater awareness among community stakeholders and the public of child care needs and services

Although some of these goals are difficult to measure, indicators were developed to determine the extent to which these objectives are currently being met by CCRR programs. Table 11, below,

outlines whether or not these outcomes were met, as measured by this evaluation, and describes the evidence used to make this determination.

**Table 11: Outcomes of stated objectives**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Increased regulated CCPs	26% increase in LNRs who became licensed	Achieving Outcome
Increased support for informal CCPs	8.5% decrease in LNRs on registry 78% LNRs received at least one home visit 28.6% decrease in home visits Comments from interviews and focus groups	Not Yet Achieving Outcome
Increased opportunities for peer support and networking	18% decrease in networking opportunities 30% decrease in number of drop-ins 27% decrease in communities served Comments from interviews and focus groups	Not Yet Achieving Outcome
Increased community knowledge re: benefits of quality child care	Comments from interviews and focus groups	Achieving Outcome
Greater potential to meet local service needs	Regional variation in utilization– but no baseline measure to compare to	Cannot be Determined
Greater awareness of child care needs and services	Comments from interviews and focus groups	Achieving Outcome
<b>OVERALL</b>	Achieving: <b>3</b> Not Achieving: <b>2</b> Cannot Determine: <b>1</b>	

### **Enhancing Community Partnerships**

Enhancing community partnerships is an essential part of the work that CCRRs do in increasing the profile of CCRR services within the community. CCRRs spend a great deal of time networking, sharing resources, and collaborating with other agencies. This allows them to develop positive working relationships that connect related services together and improve the program’s depth and coverage. Agencies are able to ‘piggy-back’ with each other in terms of reaching new clients, improving community awareness through joint efforts, and in some case, through sharing funding and staff time to produce events and promote services.

Community partners were the second largest respondent group on the online survey, a fact which in itself speaks to the success of CCRRs in linking with multiple agencies across the province. These partners were asked about the nature of their relationship with the CCRR sites. The most frequent arena in which community partners interacted with CCRRs was through referring clients to the CCRR program (81 per cent; Table 12). Sitting on committees or meetings, an activity that was mentioned frequently by staff as part their descriptions of duties, was also a common activity, with 77 per cent of community partners mentioning doing so. As well, 64 per cent of community partners said they had hosted or planned events with the CCRR in the past.

**Table 12: Community partner-reported activities with CCRR sites, online survey**

Activity	Frequency	%
We have received referrals from the CCRR	83	36%
We have referred others to the CCRR	187	81%
We have run programs with the CCRR	108	47%
We have hosted or planned events with the CCRR	148	64%
We sit on committees with or meet with staff from the CCRR	177	77%
We share facilities with the CCRR	60	26%
We have not been involved with the CCRR	1	<1%
We have been involved with the CCRR in another way	15	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100%</b>

Regardless of the reason for involvement, CCRR staff, clients and community partners all generally spoke positively of the relationship between organizations. Those who expressed dissatisfaction with their relationship to the CCRR stated that there was a limited CCRR presence in outreach communities and that funding changes to the CCRR had affected their ability to work together.

Many of the CCRR sites across the province are housed within another organization. In general, the relationship between the CCRR and host agency was viewed as being positive and beneficial. Shared resources and staff knowledge, inter-agency referrals and professional development opportunities were cited as benefits off this type of model. Some staff and clients, however, expressed concern about the relationship between these organizations. Specifically, they worried about possible funding conflicts and the added level of bureaucracy that arose from having the CCRR affiliated with or housed within another agency.

### **Additional Outcomes Articulated by Respondents**

As well as addressing the six stated immediate objectives of the CCRR program, survey respondents and interview participants identified a number of other outcomes that the CCRR has accomplished. Many of these speak to the long-term goals of the CCRR, which are:

- Improved quality and accessibility of child care;
- Improved knowledge and capacity of child care in the community; and
- Improved participation in the economy and healthy child development.

### Quality of Child Care Providers

While it is a part of the CCRR mandate to increase awareness regarding quality child care and child care options, the goal of improving the quality of child care providers is considered to be a long-term rather than immediate one. Nonetheless, many respondents reported that the quality of child care providers in their area had improved because of the CCRR services. Child care providers themselves noted that the training and information they had accessed through the CCRRs enabled them to be better providers.

*“It has affected [me] for the better because I have new ideas for the kids all the time and different ways to deal with issues when they come up.” (Child care provider)*

### Child Care Capacity and Economic Opportunities

The need for child care spaces was a topic of great importance to all participants. For the most part, respondents repeatedly emphasized that there were not enough child care providers in their community to meet the needs of families. However, respondents also noted that the CCRR has worked to address this shortage in terms of supporting LNRs in setting up and developing their businesses. For many child care providers, this assistance was essential to their getting their businesses off the ground, and was what enabled them to begin economically viable enterprises in the first place.

*“For me I started as an LNR and then the lady who was in charge at that time, she helped me get started... helped me with resources and my First Aid kit... they paid for my First Aid training as well and helped me get all that figured out and all the rest of it, and then put me on their referral list... all my kids that I got were from them.”*  
(Child care provider)

### Strengthening Families

Participants in the evaluation identified non-financial benefits to the program as well. In particular, participants emphasized the fact that through the CCRR services, families in their community were supported and strengthened. This ranged from simply supporting family practices that were already in place to providing significant support and encouragement to families in greater need. Supporting parents allows parents to feel safer and more confident in raising their children, especially when they are new to parenting or not well-connected elsewhere in the community.

*“The more connected that... children and families are to non-judgmental, supportive services, the less the children will be at risk [of experiencing negative outcomes].”* (Parent)

### **Community Needs Not Met by the CRRs**

All participants in the evaluation were asked whether there were any community needs that the CRR had not met. For the most part, the answer was that the CRRs are providing the right services, just not enough of them.

The two areas in particular that were identified by staff as requiring more resources were training and outreach. Training is especially in demand in light of recent changes to licensing regulations for child care providers. Other programs for which the CRRs are not able to provide enough support include home visits, especially for licensed providers.

Other comments from evaluation participants regarding needs not met pointed to changes in funding levels and the challenges that this created in staffing and providing core services, including support visits, stock for the resource and lending libraries, outreach, networking and drop-in programs, recruitment of child care providers, and the provision of training for interested participants. Although increases were observed compared to the previous year in service usage in the areas of consultations, memberships for licensed child care providers and assistance with subsidy applications, many of these activities are dependent on the ability of the CRRs to continue to build relationships with parents, providers, and community partners. Participants emphasized that relationship building takes a commitment of staffing and resources and they feared that decreases in funding would impact the ability of the CRRs to continue to build strong relationships in their communities.

Clients of the CCRRs report that the services provided meet important needs in their communities. Indeed, the majority of comments expressing dissatisfaction with services were with regard to service volume, with parents, child care providers, and community partners all emphasizing that there was a greater demand for services than the CCRRs could meet, particularly in relation to training and outreach. In the case of access to training, in particular, there is an added pressure of new regulations that require ECE and licensed providers to attend a greater number of training hours. Regardless of these concerns, however, clients and community partners report benefiting from the CCRR programs and staff report high levels of job satisfaction overall.

## **Recommendations**

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While satisfaction with the CCRR is generally high, there are a number of specific areas in which targeted improvements may increase the efficacy of the program. The recommendations that follow cross lines of responsibility between the individual CCRR programs and MCFD and likely would require joint effort to ensure workable solutions that are respectful of the needs and resources available in individual communities.

- **Build awareness** – participants indicated that there were issues surrounding branding and awareness of the CCRR programs and services. A provincially funded advertising campaign could allow for the creation of consistent, high quality promotional materials to communicate the messages of the CCRR to the public, though this needs to be balanced with the CCRRs’ capacity to respond to the interest generated through such a campaign.
- **Continue to build relationships** – A continued emphasis on relationship building needs to be a primary focus of the CCRR program. In this context relationships are not only those fostered with the CCRRs and child care providers and families, but those developed between providers, among families, and within the communities they serve. CCRRs need the resources to offer relationship-building opportunities for their clients.
- **Ensure flexibility** - Every community in BC is unique and has special needs and characteristics which influence service delivery. Thus, while it is important to set standards to ensure quality services are being delivered to clients across the province, care should be taken so that these standards are not simply applied uniformly. Contracts should take into account and be able to encompass important regional differences.
- **Consider funding and resources** – Even though the topic of funding changes was not expressly covered in the original interview, focus group, and survey questions, it was a subject that evaluation participants frequently mentioned. While input on funding decisions is beyond the scope of this evaluation, where this information is valuable is on the effect it has on ensuring quality service delivery, retaining quality staff, and establishing commitment to and trust in the overall vision of the CCRRs. This evaluation has brought to the fore how recent changes in funding have been perceived and influenced service usage and provision among child care providers, parents, and CCRR staff.
- **Encourage innovation** – In the face of funding cutbacks, discrepancies between supply and demand for quality child care, and competition for service delivery offered through other organizations, CCRRs will need to come up with innovative solutions. Partnering with other organizations and educational facilities, exploring new cost-effective promotional activities, and pairing CCRR services to maximize effectiveness represent some of the innovative solutions

reported in this evaluation. Providing opportunities for CCRR staff to network may assist them in sharing strategies for addressing service gaps and resource shortfalls.

- Provide professional development – Training for both staff and child care providers needs to be highlighted. Among staff challenged by depleted resources and changing environments, professional development is necessary to keep them engaged and aware of new directions in the field. Changes to the training requirements for child care providers are frustrating obstacles if opportunities for training are not provided, especially in areas where the CCRRs represent the primary resource for such training. CCRRs need the resources to meet the demand for training.
- Emphasize core values – This evaluation has emphasized that the CCRRs are doing well in displaying their commitment to MCFD core values of partnerships, professionalism, respect for diversity, lifelong learning, and well-being for all.

While the CCRRs appear to be meeting the needs of existing clients, there are clearly areas in which improvements can be made. These improvements will ensure that the individual programs are able to meet the unique needs of their communities, continue to support the development and wellbeing of their staff, and both maintain existing clients and attract new ones to their services. By acting on these recommendations, the CCRR will be better able to meet its short, intermediate, and long-term objectives.

## **Conclusion**

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This evaluation has highlighted that, while certainly not without challenges, the CCRR program is doing an exceptional job at striving toward ensuring that quality, accessible child care is available to the families of British Columbia. While recent statistics show decreases in service usage in many areas and cutbacks in funding have stretched the staff and programs, it became increasingly clear throughout the course of this evaluation that those involved with the CCRR are committed to preserving quality child care in BC. Despite the fact that the timing of this project coincided with lower levels of services provided at the CCRRs and changes in demand as a result of summer and school holidays, participants responded in large numbers. Those who participated spoke with passion and commitment. Submissions were even received in the form of drawings and letters from children who pleaded that the service be maintained.

The momentum gathered through this commitment and this passion needs to be harnessed to continue to strengthen the connections between CCRRs and the communities they serve. This will help ensure CCRRs remain responsive to the child care needs of families now and in the future. The results of this evaluation clearly demonstrate that the foundations of a strong program have been laid in terms of a clear mission, a shared philosophy, and dedicated staff. Continuing to support this program through innovation, commitment of resources, professional development and continued responsiveness to community needs will allow the CCRR to move forward in its ultimate mandate to ensure that “children are safe and healthy and receive the best system of support.”